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Miss Grace of All Souls
A story of the coalfield
W E Firebuck

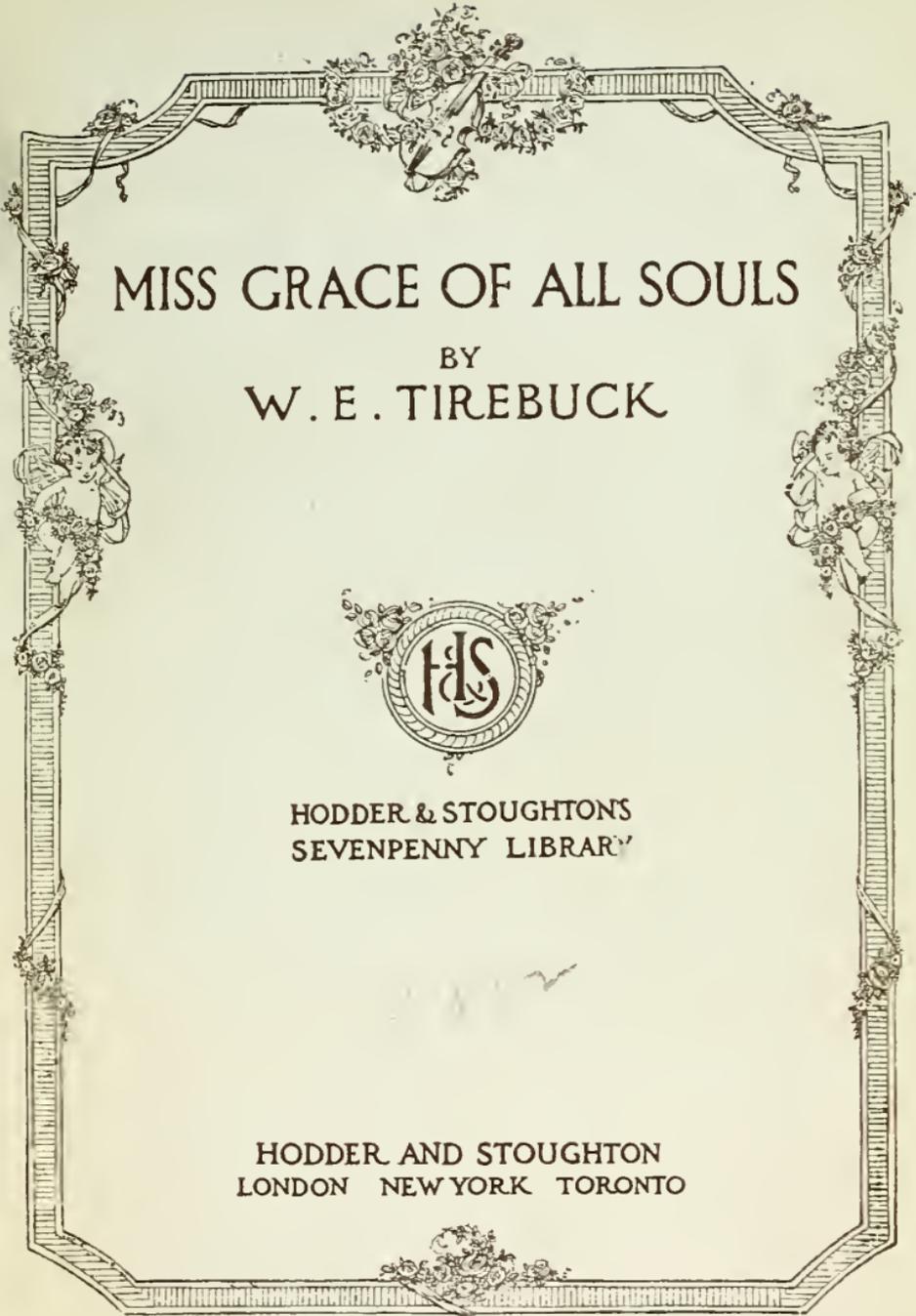
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|---------------------------|--|-------------------------|---|
| <i>Rev Egerton Waide.</i> | <i>Vicar of the Parish Church in the mining village of Beckerton-beyond-Brow</i> | <i>Dick Ockleshaw</i> | <i>Their soldier son</i> |
| | | <i>Sam Ockleshaw</i> | <i>Their other son</i> |
| | | <i>Rachel Ockleshaw</i> | <i>Their daughter</i> |
| <i>Mr Peter Brookster</i> | <i>The wealthy owner of the coalfields.</i> | <i>Britton Lloyd</i> | <i>Rachel's lover.</i> |
| <i>Dan Ockleshaw</i> | <i>An old collier</i> | <i>Grace Waide</i> | <i>The Vicars daughter</i> |
| <i>Ned Ockleshaw</i> | <i>His son, also a collier</i> | <i>Harry Brookster</i> | <i>Son of Mr Peter Brookster, in lov. with Grace.</i> |
| <i>Nance Ockleshaw</i> | <i>Ned's wife</i> | | |

Scene:- A coal-mining village in Northern England.

Time:- About 1890



"To submit would be wrong"



MISS GRACE OF ALL SOULS

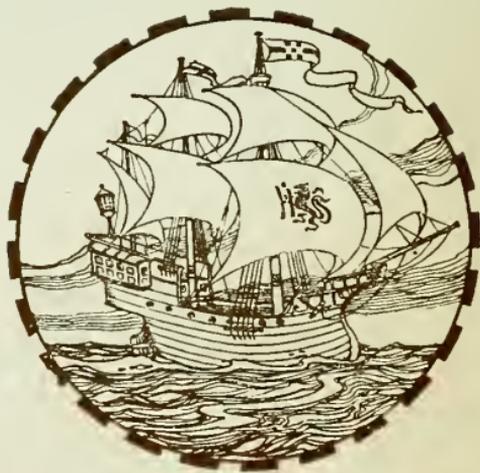
BY
W. E. TIREBUCK



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CHAPTER I

DARKNESS AND LIGHT

“ ‘Get up!’ the caller calls; ‘Get up!’
And in the dead of night
To win the bairns their bite and sup
I rise a weary wight.
“ My flannel dudden donn’d, thrice o’er
My bairns are kissed, and then
I with a whistle shut the door
I may not ope again.”

From “ Carols from the Coalfield,”

By Joseph Skipsey.

It was dark. It was raining. The great round drops splashed upon the red-brick pavement of Brookster’s Yard in the light of an open cottage door like molten pennies turning to blood. Looking out from an old man’s chair near the doorway, night within night could be seen, for through the darkness the driving rain-mist was visible; through the rain-mist, as through a bleared window, was black, distant coiling smoke, now turned red by the flare of a furnace, now ghostly by the lit-up whiteness of steam.

“ My sakes! did you see yon?” said shaky, seventy-year-old Dan Ockleshaw, moving his chair out of range of the doorway. “ Lord be with ’em in No. 2!”

“ See what, fayther?” asked his middle-aged son Ned.

“ A fireball, lad, ziggle-zaggle down the sky, and into the pit-mouth as clean as a needle an’ thread. God’s life! Yon’s rockety thunder, for you! Cover th’ irons, Nance, lass. Her shakes the very crocks.”

“ It’ll easy do that,” said Ned—“ easy do that when it shakes th’ earth when you’re down inside her. It’s to be hoped they’ve not started the soft end to-night.”

“ Why?” asked Nance, Ned’s short, natty, lean little wife, looking as if she had been born on the shining thin spindles of a loom, and fed into pale sinews on cotton.

Her Ned took three long lighting pulls at his short pipe, stroked his closely-cropped round head, and, to put in more time, felt his beardless cheeks and his tufted chin as if he thought of a shave.

"Why?" repeated Nance. Then Rachel, a buxom daughter of eighteen, also asked the question by standing in the middle of the floor and waiting for him to speak.

"Oh, nowt—nowt."

The little mother and the big daughter went to the door, and looked beyond the mist to the pits away in the smoky hollow.

"It's passing; the moon's coming through the thick of it," said Nance.

"No, no," said old Dan; "the thunder's too quick at the back o' the lightnin' yet. Stand in, wi' ye. Lors! hark ye at yon! Day o' judgment couldn' be louder. Come in! If pit wor turned inside out, what's the good o' gazing theer? Eyes wouldn' mend it."

"I saw the lodge o' Beckerton Old Hall i' that last un," said Nance.

"Oh, ay," said old Daniel, "lightnin' knows nowt o' rich and poor. Old Mester Brookster's big room will have it just the same as our cot. We're all in the one world."

"Only some are in the best corners on it," said Ned. "If it's to be a question of pickin' and chosin' wheer ye can have your thunder and lightning, aw'd sooner have it in Beckerton Old Hall than down Beckerton Old Pit or here. In the like o' this, there ain't the same elbow-room eether for you or it."

"Nonsense, Ned! Hold that kind o' talk till it's o'er."

"It's just as true now as i' sunshine," answered Ned; "and," he added on second thoughts, "it's just as true *of* sunshine. If aw could pick me light instead o' pickin' coal, aw'd take it in Beckerton Old Hall, if ye please."

"But ye can't, ye see."

"I can't, that's true; but I don't see it, dad. Mester Brookster's a man; I'm a man——"

"Ay, with a difference," said old Daniel. "He's a gentleman—a born gentleman—his fayther wor a gentleman afore him."

"I don't care a trouser button if he wor afore or after; he may be a gentleman corpse or a gentleman angel for

owt it matters to the likes of us, when yer come to what aw call the kernel o' the nut. He what they call 'owns' coal. We get it. We get it wi' the hands, head, neck, back, legs; every bone in us gets it. He sells it by word o' mouth or on paper, he can sell it wi' his gloves on, he can sell it over a dinner—nay, he needn't trouble that much—he has someun who sells it for him. Anyhow, he gets gold for it, and we get someut we call brass. No, fayther, it's no use; your owd way of lookin' at things has gone out by the back-door. Pity it couldn' be kicked owt by the front! Wheer's—old—Mester—Brookster—at this same moment? Hey?"

"At home, aw s'pose."

"Ay, at home, snug i' slippers. And his born gentleman Harry?"

"In Lon'on, by all accounts."

"Ay, luk at that!—But wheer's—our—Sam? Hey?"

"I' th' pit."

"And wheer do I go i' th' mornin'?"

"Pit."

"And wheer did you go for fifty odd year, day on day?"

"Pit—an' aw didn' grummel."

"Then more fooil thee, old dad—more fooil thee, fayther. If thee and thy lot had begun where we're startin', there'd bin a bit o' Beckerton Old Hall about us be now. Hast tha a bankin' account? Hast tha shares in this and shares in that? slices o' land here and slices o' land theer, as if th' earth wor a Cheshire cheese?"

"Tha knows I had a bit o' money i' th' bank, lad; but aw've lived it out. It's gone——"

"Owd Brookster's bank money has gone, too; but his has gone up, aw reckon. If owd Brookster, young Brookster, Mrs. Brookster, and her two gals all lived to the age o' three Methusalems, they wouldn' live their pile o' money out. No, no, fayther; we're beginnin' to see things down in yon pits. We ain't all in th' dark. Lightning or no lightning outside, there's a bit of lightning in us, and thunder, too, and we'll be seen and heard if they don't mind. They'd wear us to the bone on'y for our bit o' brain that's beginnin' to put us right. Talk about blacks—nigger blacks—the blacks that you, fayther, used to go white about because they weren't free! Why'

we are blacks! The only difference is that we can wash our black off for an hour or two; but on it comes again, day after day, year after year."

"Maybe tha wants to live like a daisy, wi' a carpet o' grass?"

Ned laughed.

"No; the owd sanded floor for me, the same fire-nook, much the same bed, the same Nance and Rachel and Sam; not one scrat o' change in all that for me. But, good as they are, God knows we'd all be all the better i' thought an' deed if the balance 'twixt those who get for those who what they call own wor struck a touch or two more on the side o' justice accordin' to the wearin' of flesh and bone—hey, Nance?"

"Livin' wouldn' be such a squeeze, if that's what tha means," replied Nance.

"It is," said Ned.

"Hullo! What's yon sound in the wind?" asked old Dan.

"Clogs on the stones," said Rachel.

Ned, Nance, and Rachel went to the door.

"Who's theer?" called out Ned.

There was no answer but the echoing metallic sound of clogs on the round flint stones.

All the cottage doors in Brookster's Yard were opened, figures came out; scared, they went to meet something they could hear making a heavy shuffling approach.

A man in advance called to the dumb gazing group at Ockleshaw's doorway:

"Sam's hurt—just a bit—turn down th' kitchen bed. There's bin a fall—it might hev bin worse. This way, lads! Lift—lift together!"

"There's life?" appealed Nance. "Life!" she repeated.

"Oh, ay!" was the answer; but Ned and Nance touched the covered still form as they tried to help, not knowing whether they touched their son Sam in life or death.

"This," said Ned fiercely, as he passed his gasping old father—"this is how *we* are paid. Gently, lads, gently. Put up th' pillow, Rache, lass. Now, mates, lift! Our poor Sammy!"

"He's none that bad, mon!" said Little Nance severely, for courage, as they were lowering him upon the bed.

"Oh no; they allus carry 'em home like this when they can walk," said Ned bitterly.

"Sammy, lad!" called Nance, turning down the dark oilskin cloth that covered him; but Sam did not hear. He was stunned, and he looked more deathly than even the dead.

CHAPTER II

A VISITOR

NEXT morning the fresh light of a spring day fell upon Miss Waide—Grace Waide—the Vicar's daughter, at Ockleshaw's door, in Brookster's Yard.

It was like the light falling upon a tall, slender, yielding stalk, topped by a flower—a marigold. Her coiled yet loose full and flossy hair was of the shade of certain light marigolds; her face long, delicate, and thoughtful, with a more delicate hint of the flush of her hair. Her full blue eyes were sympathetic. Even her figure was sympathetic in its supple readiness to bend towards another's look or speech.

"May I come in?" she whispered, as natty little Mrs. Ockleshaw approached.

"Certily, Miss Grace."

And as Grace stepped into the cottage, Nance swept any possible dust off a rush-bottom chair with her white apron; tall old Dan rose and stood by the fireplace like a waxwork figure fixed at an unalterable degree of respect.

"I was exceedingly sorry to hear—of this," said Grace in low tones, taking a seat, and glancing towards the meagrely cotton-curtained bed where Sam was asleep.

Tears toppled over Nance's eyelids, and were down her face like runnels as far as her quivering chin before her thin, bare, shining arms and hands could get her apron there.

"It's his back, I hear?"

Nance's head nodded.

"Not seriously, I very much hope, Mrs. Ockleshaw. . . ."

I wish he had been awake. . . . I should like to have a word with him—a little talk."

"If it's prayer, miss, let it be whiles he's asleep. Sam couldn' abide it awake. He'd be like to thinkin' he wor on the death; an', thank the Lord, so far, it isn't that this time. He's bad; but nowt's broke. His bones is bones yet. He wor sayin' at daylight this mornin' that yon lightning passed him like a white boggart i' the pit, and then came the fall. Props was matchwood, and our Sam wor more nor half under. Britton Lloyd heerd him, and dug him out. Britton Lloyd, Miss Grace, as is a-courtin' our Rache."

"Where is your husband?"

"In the pit, Miss Grace; he's on day-shift."

"And he was not afraid to go after—this?"

"Afraid or no afraid, Miss Grace, hunger comes, and down they mun go—e'en to the same fall. That's it, Miss Grace; and what the son has missed the poor fayther may get."

"Well, we won't think of that," said Grace.

"But what if you do think on it? and you can't think off it? and it's theer? And you see with two on 'em, miss, one night and one day, aw've the whole year round of it; and aw'm not so used to it yet but what aw'm always a kind of surprised to see 'em come home as they went—wi' every limb. Ah, Miss Grace, it's enough to mak' folk believe in miracles wi'out Scriptur'. Aw'll believe owt after this of our Sam. The fact is, he ought to be dead—be what happened. Dead. It tak's me all my wits to believe him alive when I hear from Britton what happened him and Jim Whitstone. Tons on him; and rock don't make a light ton. It has a way o' finding wheer you keep your bones, miss; but somehow, by the help o' Providence, our Sam's bones were not to be found, and he still has 'em as right as the legs of yon chair. Well, he desarves 'em. He's a good lad. One shillin' and sixpence a week he keeps for hissel—he's savin'—and the rest is on the table like high folk, middlin' folk, and common folk—gold (when he gets it) here, silver theer, and copper theer."

"That's not like every son, Mrs. Ockleshaw," said Grace, with a look which gave the silent history of some selfish ones she knew.

"I know nowt or owt of anyone but me own. *He's* good. Few words, slow, sure, and a head as thinks—that's Sam. He gets it from his fayther, but his fayther talks more."

"And does less?" playfully suggested Grace.

"N—o, n—o. His fayther'll do a pile o' doin'—too much sometimes."

Grace gently laughed; then, looking sympathetically towards old Dan, she gently asked:

"What do *you* think, grandfather?"

Dan would have been much more comfortable had he not been consulted. He was so honoured by the attention that he could not answer. He seemed to be feeling in his vest-pockets for his reply, and at an off-chance that it might be right, he said, "Yes'm, miss," and his sunken gums worked as if they had something ideal to eat. He gazed at the yellow sand on the flagged floor, and hoped that his cross-examination was over. In the meantime his hand, hanging from his vest-pocket, trembled, one knee shook—and Grace considerably looked away at the bed.

The clothes about Sam's shoulder were moving. His fair hair at the back was more visible, and part of his young beard could be seen.

"Art ta wake, Sam?" asked his little mother, going to the bed and looking towards the back of his head in faith, for she was not tall enough to see over to his face. "Sammy, lad, art ta wake?"

"Lift, lads, lift," muttered Sam; "the prop's across th' heart o' me. Another half-inch'll stop it—lift!"

"Dreaming," whispered Grace.

"But aw'll wake him out o' yon pit," said Nance, shaking him. "Sam! It's of no use o' him havin' th' agonies again, if they are on'y second-hand in a dream. Sam, lad!"

"Thee, mother?" asked Sam, surprised to see her, the bed, and the wall.

"Ay, lad; an' a lady as 'as come to ask after thee."

He glanced towards Grace's chair, but his eyes glided away before they received a definite impression.

"Tha knows her," urged his mother. "Her's no stranger. Tha knows Miss Waide? The Vic'rage, lad! Miss Grace o' All Souls', lad!"

He looked definitely; then his blue eyes again glided away to smile their recognition up at the figured cotton bed-curtain.

"Strange tha took so long," said his mother. "Art ta easy, lad?"

He nodded.

"Better?"

He nodded again.

"Where is your pain?" asked Grace.

"Back an' arms, miss . . . an' down be me ankles . . . an' the back o' my head beats."

There was a sound of something being broken out in Brookster's Yard.

"Oh, what's yon, mother?" he asked, with a nervous shrinking, and his face contracted with terror and pain.

"Ay," answered his mother, indignant on his behalf. "Some folk don't even know how to cast a broken crock away. It's on'y Mrs. Dawson, Sam." Then she said in a lower tone to Grace: "Everything's a fall to him now, poor lad! an' no doubt will be for a bit. Hey, Miss Grace, but this is a earth! Man began wi' a fall, an' aw s'pose its bin nat'ral to us ever since. Hullo, Rachel!" called the little mother, turning to her big, bonny daughter, who at the sight of Grace moved her black-and-white check headshawl, and tried to walk lightly with her clogs. "Tha sees you and me's not the on'y nurses Sam has. And what does th' doctor say, lass?"

"He'll look in i' the aifternoon. We're to do the same as afore."

Rachel looked at Sam's averted head, and with a jerk of her thumb over her shoulder she signalled her mother to go outside. Quick Nance signalled back, and then almost loud enough for Sam to hear, even if he had been aleep, she slowly said:

"Aw—mun—get—some—coal—for—dinner—fire. Can—tha—cut—me—a—bit—o'—wood—Rache?"

And under cover of that device Rachel followed her mother out. Outside, Rachel whispered:

"Jim Whitstone's dead. Half an hour back. Poor Sally Bolton's fair daft."

"The poor wight! No wonner, wi' a fun'ral i'stead of a weddin'—a fun'ral i'stead of a weddin'! The creetur!

Say nowt to Sam. If he asks, say poor Jim's better. It's truth—in a way; he is better—better theer nor here, at this rate."

They returned to the kitchen. They had hardly reached the bed, when the sound of clogs on the bricks of Brookster's Yard caused the women to stand listening.

"It's fayther, I do believe!" whispered Rachel.

"It isn't a workin' step if it is. It sounds like th' Miners' Arms i' th' legs to me."

"It is fayther," said Rachel. "Go to him, mother; he's— Don't be frighten, miss . . . Fayther went out to work, but Sam's luck must hev scared him. He's had a sup."

"Here, thick-head! sit thee down till I can talk to thee," said Nance, with a great effort at self-suppression because of the presence of Miss Waide. "Sit thee down, wastrel!" she added, as she backed him into the domestic stocks of a big arm-chair, and gave him a jerky push on the chest that seemed to lock him in his place.

"Ah, miss, miss!" sighed the brave little woman, as she approached Grace, who at once rose to remove some of the discomfiture of the situation by going; "when a man fools it, the woman has to be all th' more wise—I'll speak to him! Thank you for calling, miss. It's very good on you. It ain't allus like this, as you know," apologized Nance, as she step by step followed Grace to the door.

"I hope Sam will continue to improve," said Grace, moving away.

"Aw hope so," said Rachel, to finally see her off, for her mother had already turned on her heel towards the domestic stocks.

Nance, indeed, almost ran there.

"And now, Ned Ockleshaw, as yo' call yoursen," she said, like a schoolmistress determined to have her form of government, as she gripped the breast part of his jacket in each hand, and shaking him into a more wakeful state for listening, "what dost ta mean, foil? It's hard enough to do wi' a fall of Sam's kind wi'out this kind o' thine, tha mean [a shake], witless [shake], thankless [shake], shabby twopence-ha'penny sort o' man!" and here the vigorous, lean little woman seemed to put six shakes into

one, as if determined to open his chest like a safe, and commit a burglary by making off with his life.

Big Ned, however, only smiled as if little Nance were tickling him. He was hardly sober enough to know that she was in earnest, and he was just tipsy enough to mistake it for fun.

"Leave him be," said old Dan. "He hasn' senses for thee just now."

"He has nonsense," retorted Nance.

"Ay, leave him be," argued Rachel. "Tha knows it's exception to th' rewel."

"If this is exception, we'll have t'other thing—we'll have rewel here!" and again Nance put her fingers around the cloth of her Ned's jacket.

"Leave him be," appealed Rachel, "an' don't go wearin' thasen shakin' him no more than a cat clawin' at a sack. Let him sleep."

"Ay, ay, mother, let him sleep," feebly called Sam.

The little mother at once sat on her low rocking-chair, sobbing in her apron. She couldn't help it. It was too bad of her Ned to do this—now, with Sam on their hands, Rachel out of the mill, and when she (Nance) was beginning to be proud that her bit of sly saving could go on.

"Oh, Ned, Ned!" she cried into her apron; "if tha had had one bit o' thy Nance's wish i' thy heart, tha wouldn' hev done this!"

"It's all right, mother," argued Rachel—"it's all right; it's but rare with him, is this, an' aw'm going' away o'er to Beckertonclough this aifternoon: the new mill's takin' on."

"Tha're not!" said her mother. "Tha fayther goes to th' pit i' th' mornin', or I thresh him!"

Rachel and Sam laughed. So did old Dan.

"Tha mun laugh; if he doesn' go aw'll thresh him—if I hev to stand on tables and chairs!"

CHAPTER III

THE SOCIAL SPELL

THE Rev. Egerton Waide, M.A., Vicar of All Souls', Beckerton-beyond-Brow, was a comfortable-looking gentleman of sixty. He had a generous breadth of shoulder, a rather

proud inward curve of the back, and a corresponding outward curve of dignity in front.

Beckerton folk called him pleasant-looking ; and indeed he was, with a ready smile, an assuring blue eye, and gray hair and beard whose swan-like whiteness adorned his reverent look in the pulpit, or his look of geniality at home or abroad.

He had been Vicar of All Souls' thirty-five years, and knew the ins and outs of Beckerton-beyond-Brow almost too well. He knew them so well that parish events came and went as a matter of course ; with the result that his curate and daughter did most of the practical Christianity all the week, while he prepared himself on the Friday and Saturday for the theoretical on the Sunday ; and that, strange to say, had much to do with the perennial pleasantness of the Rev. Egerton Waide.

Mr. Waide looked particularly pleasant on the afternoon of the morning of his daughter's visit to Brookster's Yard, even though over luncheon she had given him particulars of Jim Whitstone's death, the state of Sam Ockleshaw, the state also of his father Ned, and the trouble that was in the home of Sally Bolton.

Yes, he was particularly pleasant-looking as he walked down the cinder-path called the Black Ribbon, along the canal towpath, over the lock bridge, up Greigson's farm field, through Watch Witch Wood, over a stile, across another field, and by a short-cut near the gamekeeper's cottage into Beckerton Park, for Beckerton Old Hall.

He had received official intimation that the directors of the Rasselton Mill Company, Limited, had the pleasure of informing the shareholders that they would be able to declare a dividend of $7\frac{1}{2}$ per cent.—a simple fact which made the grass greener, the daisies whiter, the pasturing sheep more lovable, and the birds more buoyant, to the Vicar of All Souls'.

Far away he saw, as he paused on the hilly side of the park to look down the busy, smoky, and still beautiful little valley, the smoke of Rasselton Mill curling up like, to him, the financial incense of $7\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. He had, as usual, been on his knees before the post arrived in the morning ; but, frankly, his thanks for all the good gifts of this earth were far more ardent when he was on his legs, on Beckerton Park

slope, and in view of Rasselton Mill. He looked far and near. He muttered a half-mute blessing on things in general, and feeling exhilarated, he listened with unusual appreciation to the song of an exalted lark. For most beings, the best incentive for an appreciation of Nature is a good dividend, and the Rev. Egerton Waide was not an exception, Vicar though he was.

When the Vicar was shown into the library at Beckerton Old Hall, little Mr. Peter Brookster, J.P., ex-M.P., head of the firm of Messrs. Peter Brookster, Son, and Co., received him with even more than his customary cordiality, and their two hands met in a grasp which on each side had the friendly pressure increased by just $7\frac{1}{2}$ per cent., for Mr. Brookster was a shareholder as well.

Mr. Brookster was a little man, but he was well packed. He was short, broad, closely knit, with a big square head and bush-like, sandy brows, and dark reddish-brown eyes. His frizzy hair had been red, but had attempted to turn gray, had failed, and was neither a good red nor a good gray, but had something of the shade of dusty cream.

Nevertheless, he had wits. More, he had gold. More still, he had land. Most of the coalfields about Beckerton and Beckerton-beyond-Brow were in his hands. That very moment, had he so wished, he could have written out a cheque for £20,000—namely, £20,000 sterling—and paid it over to the Vicar, without the usual life of Beckerton Old Hall being affected by it in the least.

There would still be the liveried servants; still the carriages and horses; still the other and more secluded country house at High Crag Wold; still the London house; still the New Liberal Club; still wealth and the possibilities of wealth, the £20,000 the less notwithstanding.

The Vicar had a very good idea of that fact, and he rejoiced that All Souls' had a man of such standing—industrial standing the Vicar called it—as a member of its congregation, if only for six times a year; for six fives are thirty, and Mr. Brookster was never known to allow the old-fashioned collection-box at All Souls' to pass him without gratifying the whole of the hushed church with the rustle of a note.

Over and above this there were special calls, which Mr. Waide had only to make known in the proper way to have

them responded to. Besides, Mr. Brookster's father gave the land for the church, contributed £500 to the building fund, set apart seventeen cottages as an endowment, and fixed a large stained-glass window to the memory of his wife, the subject being, "COME UNTO ME, ALL YE THAT LABOUR AND ARE HEAVY LADEN, AND I WILL GIVE YOU REST."

All this would have toned the conscience even of a new bishop, not to say anything of that of an old vicar, thirty-five years in the one parish, with his house and coal fire, and his social footing at a Hall with a son and heir—everything that a man with a daughter could wish.

As usual Mr. Brookster brought out his box of cigars; as usual the Vicar yielded, though he did not smoke anywhere but in Mr. Brookster's library; and even after those excusable occasions he always took the precaution on the way home to chew the cedar-wood of a blacklead pencil lest his daughter Grace should find him guilty of a depravity which he openly detested among the miners, with "their greasy clays and their abominable twist."

With their cigars and in their easy-chairs, facing each other, the two men talked of Rasselton Mill, big coal contracts, the Disestablishment question in Wales, the depreciation of public-house property, South African diggings, the drop in American railways, and Mr. Harry and the Liberal seat for Blankford.

They talked until the dinner-gong hummed through the main hall. The Vicar was pressed to stay—it was only a little house-party of eight—and he stayed.

It was very dark when the Vicar was socially set free, and Mr. Brookster kindly ordered the brougham to take him home.

At home, one of the first questions which Grace asked was:

"Did you say anything about the 'fall' at No. 2?"

"Why—eh—no, dear; the fact is, I hadn't a chance."

"And didn't Mr. Brookster himself say anything?"

"No, child—no. Any letters?"

Her eyes became shadowed and her face grave.

"We might have done—we ought to have done, dear; but—well, you know what he is: business, business; then came dinner, and he had friends. Anything new? How is—eh—what's-his-name?" he asked, opening a

letter. "Better? Ah!—has Mr. Rew been? He can look after those tea-tickets—you needn't go with him as well. Don't do too much for him, dear, or you *may*. Mr. Harry is coming from London to-morrow. He's going to contest Blankford. We're invited up."

Grace tried to look as if Mr. Harry's return was quite an ordinary event; then for her father's sake she smiled.

But there were tears not far off her blue eyes; there were wild thoughts of the world, of wealth and work, of rich and poor, and of conscience and crime; and she shortly left the room to give her masterful emotions the partial freedom of tears.

CHAPTER IV

THE COURTING OF "OUR RACHE"

FOR two weeks before Sam Ockleshaw was struck down by a fall of earth in No. 2 pit, Britton Lloyd had not been near Brookster's Yard. He avoided it.

Britton and Rachel, indeed, had had a quarrel—a lovers' quarrel—a lovers' quarrel over love itself—a quarrel over even a kiss.

They had been for their Sunday evening stroll over Beckerton Brow, through Watch Witch Wood, round by Tollworth Dam, over Crossways Stile and back by Greigson's farm, the canal towpath, and the lock-bridge.

The shadowy lock-bridge was the spot where they always enacted "good-night" with a great deal of lingering detail. There was a low stone coping on which they sat as if they were whispering conspiracies to leave the world and light, and live in the dark for the rest of their natural and supernatural lives.

To see Britton Lloyd's bent, yearning form in the dark, with his arms as far away from himself, and as much around Rachel Ockleshaw as they could get, you would have thought that he was mining, getting coal, strenuously working in a narrow two-feet seam. But he was only wishing her "good-night"—a long "good-night," a reluctant "good-night"—for one more week. Only on Sundays could he pay court in that rare fashion,

because on week-days, being on night shift, he slept all morning, paid a sort of awkward lukewarm afternoon call at Brookster's Yard, and went to the pit for the night.

Now, it was understood as solemnly as any European treaty—much more solemnly, indeed, on the part of Rachel Ockleshaw—that the moment they rose from that lock-bridge coping-stone, and were ascending the Black Ribbon cinder-path for Brookster's Yard, a little beyond the top, there was to be "no more on it; no more billin' and cooin' afore folk; not a look on it—i' th' house, at th' door, or i' th' yard at the last. He could say good-night, of course, like the rest o' folk; but it wor to be like the rest o' folk, and he could have a shake o' th' hand, but as for owt else, she wouldn' have it. She wor not goin' to have the yard women an' wenchies gigglin' ahind windows an' doors. Lovin' wor no foolin' wi' her, and she wouldn' have others laughin' at it for foolin' neether! And that was flat!"

One Sunday night that spring, after one of the most prolonged coping-stone communions on record, Britton took Rachel home.

As usual, he went into the house. He saw Conservative old Dan sitting in his old chair in his old week-day clothes; Radical, round-headed, tuft-bearded Ned in black and a blue velvet vest; independent, nondescript young Sam in black too; and that Queen, Premier, Chancellor of the Exchequer, and Home Secretary of the whole place, the lean little wife Nance, as cheery as a cricket, and as alive as an ant, in her brown Sunday winsey, her scarlet-striped shoulder-shawl, and an apron as clean as a sheet of cream-laid note, and with a face as clear as a star.

"Now, fayther," said Nance to her husband, as Britton and Rachel entered, "get up and give Britton the chair."

"Aw'm hang'd well sure aw sharn't!" replied Ned, in such vigorous good humour that the vigour almost made it bad.

"Tha can sit on th' bed," argued Nance, and followed it up with an almost tilting jerk of her head.

"He can sit on th' bed hissen—he's nearest," said Ned.

"Hey, but, mon, tha'rt a thick un!" replied Nance in

an aside which was heard all over the little stage of the kitchen.

Ned saw that it was serious. "Come on, lad!" said he, rising. "Sit, thee here. The missis is mester i' this house, and tha'rt th' fav'rite, just like I wor wi' Nance's mother—till I married. Ay, till I married; then, bless yo', I had to scrat for a seat mysen—on stool, on floor, on bed, on me own hecl; anywheer's good enough for a married man when a bachelor walks in, 'specially if his name's Britton, an' he can play 'armonium and sing foreign in Welsh, and earn nigh thirty a week, an' save i' the Post-Office, and send to his owd mother in Wales—an' court. Ay, bachelors be the men; it's them as can do all that, and keep the Sunday blacks fro' pawn, an' go wakein' at Whitsun, an' allus look as if they're not thinkin' of to-morrow. My mon! but wait thee a bit, wait thee a bit; wait till tha turns thy mouth i'to four others, thy feet i'to eight, and ev'ry one of 'em lookin' bare at ye for worsted and clog. Tha bonny tight brown skin will slacken, aw reckon!"

"What's the man clatterin' at, Britton, lad?" asked Nance, severely assuming ignorance. "Does he know hissen? Hast ta been to th' Ebenezer to-night, Britton?"

"Ay—tow-path service!" called Ned from the bedside. "Two preachers an' two of a congregation; an' two makin' a collection!"

"Now, fayther, fayther," put in son Sam quietly, "that's enough. Give us a tune, Britton;" and, as a further invitation, Sam bent over his chair and lifted the lid of his diminutive harmonium.

"Rock o' Ages!" called trembling old Dan from the fire-nook, rubbing his hands in expectation.

"Let it be anythin' the lad hissen pleases," said Nance. "What pleases him will please us"; but after a sympathetic look at old Dan, she added: "Or if th' owd man craves for th' Rock un, let him hev it, Britton, lad, if it comes to thy fingers nat'rul."

"An' gie it full out," suggested quiet Sam; "as tha does to thysen down i' th' four-foot-six."

Dark-eyed, curly-haired Britton modestly laughed, and as a refuge from his own confusion he tugged his moustache, and said:

"When did *you* hear me?"

"Aw've heer'd, and heer'd *of*," answered Sam.

"Ay, ay," said Nance, "aw'd like to hear it nat'rul at his work mysen"; and even Rachel ventured as near the spirit of courting as to say:

"We mun go to pit air-hole some night an' listen"; whereupon Britton ventured quite a coping-stone glance with his bright black eyes; and the intensified colour crept over Rachel's homely, affectionate face like a hidden spring widening its suffusing range over a patch of ruddy sand.

Britton, the deeper in love by the depth of that colour, turned to the little harmonium, nervously played over the familiar tune, and started a tenor solo with:

"Rock of Ages cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee."

"A minute, Brit, lad!" loudly called big Ned, dangling his long heavy feet from the bedside. "Aw've allus had a mind to ask the real meaning o' that theer."

"Hould in thy interruptions, man," said Nance. "Tha's allus a mind to someut but to mind thy own business."

Ned laughed, and kicked the heels of his Sunday boots.

"If tha don't know it," continued Nance, "more shame for thee; and for conscience's sake, if not for ours, keep thy sinnin' feet still. It isn't a dance; and remember, yon bed's bin made once."

"Aw've allus thought that a queer song for us colliers," said Ned to his boots, and from them to the household, and then muttered, "'Rock o' Ages, cleft for me, let me hide mysen i' Thee.' It's more like 'Rock o' Ages, cleft for mesters'—that's what *aw* seem to hide in it for!"

"Fayther!" called fair-haired Sam earnestly, as he felt his young beard.

"Hey, Ned Ockleshaw," gravely said Nance, with something of the day of judgment in her tones, "hey, Ned! How can tha expect to go wheer tha com'd from? Tha'st a big rockonin' wi' that Mester as tha don't seem to reckon with. Shame on thee! Another start, Britton, love."

Britton, a little more flushed, began again. He sang sweetly and clearly; and very soon most of the women and a few of the men of the seven cottages in Brookster's

Yard were at their doors listening. Several children quietly went to Ockeshaw's doorstep, making themselves comfortable against each other and the door frame; and by the time that Rachel joined the "chorus" (a repetition of the first verse) with her domestic, untrained contralto, and Sam with his Methody-meeting baritone, and little Mrs. Ockleshaw with a sort of falsetto superannuated soprano, that could only find its safe levels when the notes were not too high and not too low—some of the children had taken advantage of the musical abstraction of the household, mounted the step, entered the kitchen, and stood in single file at the wall by the door. To show that they were perfectly welcome, good-natured little Nance, even while she was tearfully singing, went to the corner cupboard, took down three cold home-made oven currant-cakes, and, still singing, gave them to the biggest girl to be divided, and then returned, singing, to the back of Britton Lloyd's chair, where she held on happier than ever, swaying to and fro just as she always did at the little Ebenezer Chapel.

The sight of the currants in the cakes, however, suddenly demoralized the youngsters—they tripped out of the kitchen, down the step, and ran.

That demoralized father Ned. He at once sent forth a most secular roar, loud above the Sunday evening hymn, jerked bodily backwards upon the bed, kicked out his feet, came up again like a Jack-in-the-box, and said to the disconcerted choir :

"Well done, little uns! They think more o' thy cakes than thy 'Rock o' Ages'; an' so do I. Gie us a cake, Nance, 'ooman; aw'm fair famished."

"I never did see a head and body like thine, man!" replied Nance, going to the cupboard. "There's not a bit o' Sunday in 'em 'cept Sunday meat. Theer, eat that, and hould thy peace, an' let folk as want a Sunday have a Sunday. Sit thee down, Britton! Tha'rt not goin', surely? Look at that now; aw'll be bound it's all through thee foolin', fayther, man!"

"No, indeed, truth, Mrs. Ockleshaw," replied Britton; with a marked Welsh accent—"no, indeed; 'tis getting late. I am after my ushal, as it is; 'tis not on 'count of your husband there, so don't go blame him for worlds,

for I 'sure you, my good woman, him or no man stop Britton Lloyd from singing when he want to and have the time to do it. 'Nother night, Mrs. Ockleshaw. *Must* go. 'Tis nearly late; and Sunday night, too. *Good-night*, everybody!"

"Well, if tha *must* go," said Nance, yielding. "It's sudden; but good-night, love lad."

"Good-night!" called all the others, with the exception of Rachel, like a chorus, and Rachel followed Britton to the doorstep.

There she at once put out her hand to hint that there was to be no delay, no show, no crisis.

He took her hand, but coaxingly tugged at it.

Feeling that they were under observation from the inside, Rachel moved off the step into the dark yard, that was gloomily lit up by the reflected lights of white and yellow blinds. She decisively whispered:

"Good-night."

But her very whisper was too much for the ardent Welsh Britton; his arm swept around her neck, he bent his face—and there was a woman's laugh three doors away, a mimicking kiss-sound from a bedroom window, and a loud call from the darkness:

"Now then!"

Rachel, muttering, flung Britton's arm aside, impatiently twisted away, went in and straight upstairs. She sat on her bed biting her cotton apron, saying almost aloud:

"Why didn't he go? Foolin' like yon! There'll be no end o' mock nonsense i' Brookster's Yard now. If it's a joke to others, it's no joke to me. Next time aw set eyes on him, aw'll speak my mind!"

Rachel took care to set severe brown eyes upon him in the street on the following day. He also set the same kind of eyes, only darker, upon her. They both stood—but as if on second thoughts. Rachel spoke her mind in good straight Saxon. Britton spoke his in warm Welsh-English. Word followed word, look followed look, flush answered flush, and pallor quivered to pallor. She had the last word, but he had the last look—and it was stern and black. It cut straight through Rachel's own shy glance to her heart; and rapidly muttering Welsh to himself as his eyes flashed,

he left her standing like a gate-post from which the gate and the other post had been carried away.

"Wheer's Britton Lloyd i' th' aifternoons?" asked Rachel's keen, diplomatic little mother one morning during the week, when old Dan was sunning himself on a bench facing the waste ground outside, when father Ned was in the pit, and son Sam was asleep upstairs, resting for his night turn. "Ay, wheer's he gotten to? Aw've missed him sin' Sunday."

"He's wheer he's a mind an' a wish to be, aw suppose," replied Rachel; and she rubbed some of her sudden heat into the steel stool which she was polishing as she knelt by the fire.

"And that used to be—here," hinted her mother, busy at the table peeling potatoes; and she shot her tongue into her cheek and winked at the wall as if the spirits of Dan, Ned, and Sam were looking out there and listening, like she was, for the next word.

Rachel did not reply. She rubbed and rubbed the same bar of the stool over and over again. She looked at it, but she hardly saw it; she listened, but she hardly heard. The whistles, bells, and horns of mines and factories seemed to hum their echoes and re-echoes about her.

"I wor sayin' as it used to be—here," repeated venturesome Nance, with a simultaneous wink of both eyes this time, while her tongue darted out and back again as if to taste the sort of venturesome thing it had said.

Again Rachel did not reply. Her plump, bare arm, her broad hand and the black rag worked to and fro along the same bright steel bar of the stool, like the shapely horizontal crank of a well-kept engine.

Her mother made a forced journey to the plate-rack above the dresser.

On the way back she stood in the middle of the kitchen. She fixed her eyes on Rachel's brown hair, plaited like a miniature beehive behind, and gazed at it as if trying to see through the back of Rachel's head to the front.

Nance turned to the table by the window, peeled another potato, frowned reflectively, worked her gums as if humouring them to go into active service, and at last she slowly said, with just a slight wavering tremor of warning affection in her voice:

"Tha mun be careful, Rache. . . . Aw say that tha mun be careful. . . . That wor not the way aw won thy fayther" (another potato plopped in the water). "A bird i' th' hand is worth two i' th' bush. . . . Waste not, want not, is as true of chances as of bread and cheese. . . . Hast ta had a bickerin'?" she asked, again going to the plate-rack to try another inspection on her return. "Many a word, many a war, were true i' my young days, and it's true i' yours," she said straight at Rachel's beehive, and sat at the table again. "Who beginn'd it? Yo' or him? . . . An' he'll be frettin' hissen like a shiverin' young pigeon—like *tha art*."

"Aw'm—not!" replied Rachel, without looking round.

"But *tha art*. Aw knows it. Tha hasn't black under thy eyes of mornin's because o' splittin' thy sides with laughin'. E'en thy fayther's seed it; an' he thinks as *he* is to blame for Sunday night. But he isn't. It's sin' then—I know it is. What's it all *about*? Aw'll be barned neether on ye dar' say!" (a potato was plopped into the water with such force that the cold splash took Nance's face by surprise). "Well, think as *you* like, but *aw* think Britton Lloyd as nice a lad as ever put one foot in front of t'other. Why, aw could wed him mysen, if it wor on'y right! Don't tha hold thy neck so stiff to him, Rache. Th'art a good lass—aw'd tell it to thy face if it wor round this way—but tha mun remember he desarves thee; Britton's a lad as desarves. Does ta *wish* him to come?"

"Not be fetchin'!" answered Rachel, still on her knees; but the instant she said it, her head bent, her apron was lifted: she was crying.

"Aw thowt tha didn' mean that; an' tha shows good sense in it. Aw think tha tears wiser nor thy words, Rache. They come from the right side o' thy head. Aw'd trust eyes afore tongues any day. Aw never saw the man or woman yet but what didn' sooner or later speak th' truth theer. Ah, well, he's a good sort; he's a lad as desarves. Dry thy eyes, Rache, lass—here's gran'fayther!"

"Aw see by the brow o' Greigson's far stile field," said old Dan, entering, "that th' young wheat, or clover, or someut, mun be through. Wor it through a-Sunday, Rache?"

Rachel made unusual noise with the fireirons.

"Aw mean when you an' Britton Lloyd wor out walkin'?"

Rachel banged the oven door.

"Is *Rasselton* smokin'?" pointedly asked Nance.

"Smokin'? It is, woman. Aw tould thee the mill 'ud do. An' so is Duke's."

"A blessin' for *Rasselton* folk, and some o' *Beckerton*, too; it's been near tight wantin' wi' some on 'em, both here and there. Look at Cousin *Lizzie's* man—three week come Monday, an' not a farthin's crossed the door but what their bits o' extras has earned i' the pledge; an' her expectin' to be laid in! She mun borrow the Vicarage 'lone linen' this time, though she made great talk o' Cousin *Sue Sotherby* doin' it but a year back. Tha sees folks can never tell how a few months can turn 'em t'other side up. It'll be t'other side up wi' poor *Liz* this time. Rache an' me will nurse her day off an' on, but that's all aw *can* do wi' th' wage *Ned* and *Sam* have managed betwix' 'em lately; th' gaffer's knocked 'em off so much a yard this week because th' stuff's 'soft,' and be the time drawers, clubs, rent, oil, pick-sharp'ing, check-weigher and aw-hardly-know-what-all is paid, it's poor as poverty to live on if yo're to save for rainy day as well. Aw do hope poor Cousin *Lizzie's* man get's a mill soon; it's hard on her and the bairns."

"It is," said Dan. "Have we seed *Britton Lloyd* sin' Sunday?"

"Bring lump o' wood in, father!" said Nance.

"Is it cut?"

"No; cut it, an' while axe is i' thy hand, cut for mornin'."

"All right," said innocent old Dan, and went out to his duty.

CHAPTER V

AND—THEN

ANOTHER week passed, and *Britton Lloyd* still kept away from *Brookster's Yard*.

Then came the pit accident to *Sam Ockleshaw*; and on the following afternoon *Britton* bravely called to see how *Sam* was doing.

Rachel was out, but she was well represented, for Nance was there.

After Britton had had a few pleasant but nervous words with Sam as he stood by the kitchen bed, Nance began :

“ Look here, lad, aw'm goin' to talk to thee ! ”

“ Now, mother,” quietly said Sam from the bed, “ leave Britton alone. Tha'll do more harm than good. It's all right.”

“ If it's all right, it's all right,” answered his resolute little mother ; “ but it'll be none the worse for bein' made better. Britton, lad, let me tell thee, in case tha don't know, that our Rache is too good a lass to be forced to pine. It's tellin' like rain on a soft stone on her. She's not the lass she wor a week sin'. She's goin' past her meat. Aw wish her were in, for thee to see wi' thy own eyes. An' it's all for a mere snap o' the finger, on one side or t'other, aw've no doubt. But come, lad, be a mon, an' not a bairn ; now snap thy finger at th' tiff, and mak' me and our Rache right agen, for her an' me's like a twin pair ; if her pines, aw pine ; if her frets, aw fret ; if her loses comfort, aw lose it ; if her—here her comes !—gie t' lass a hug and have done ! ”

When Rachel saw Britton she suddenly stood stupid and still by the stairs—she turned pale—her hand went to her side.

Nance, seeing Britton Lloyd move towards Rachel, turned to the fire and listened. She heard murmurs—she heard tremulous mutterings—she heard shuffling feet move to the little back kitchen and close the door.

Soon the back kitchen was as silent as a cage from which two pairing birds have escaped.

Britton and Rachel had gone out through the back-door. They went for a walk over the black, miry, puddled slag ground, where, even there, the spring grass declined to be choked, even though it had to come up for breath in single blades.

They went down by Aynsley's Dip, and were soon on the canal path, soon under a little brick bridge, where the sun and the moving water were casting up golden reflections—quivering northern lights on the red-brick arch.

They stood and leaned there.

Britton was softened, Rache was penitent, and though

they could not yet look into each other's eyes, the fingers of one of Britton's hands were interknit with hers.

They watched the play of the water and the sun—Rachel's eyes joyously tearful; his eyes sorrowful, moody, gazing into the water as if it held his mistake in Brookster's Yard, his sharp words and his severe look in the street.

Rachel felt his hand twitch—she felt him sigh—she glanced up, and the sight of his sorrow over the past which her eyes took down with them as they dipped to the water again, touched her to be loving, yielding, frank, and brave. She pressed his hand, and, bending her head, she said with all the modesty, and yet all the true majesty, of love :

“Tha—may—tak'—one—if—tha—likes.”

And Britton's arm swept round her neck—her face lifted to his—he seemed to take what she gave, she what he gave. She openly wept with very joy, and in an ecstatic sob she said, with her head on his breast :

“No more misunderstandin's for me, aw pray God !”

“The first and last,” said Britton clearly; “for if any lad has the right and good wish for you, lass, he's standing by you now. . . . Rache, when can I wed? . . . Sometime summer?”

Rachel considered. In a few minutes she said :

“Tha sees their's our Sam hurt. Aw couldn't think on it if he's bed-fast; an' there's no telling yet. Let's get him to work agen—and then.”

CHAPTER VI

THINKIN' ALL ROUND

ALMOST as soon as Britton Lloyd and Rachel had disappeared into the back-kitchen there was a tap at the front-door.

Nance pressed her eyes in her apron, jerked down her two hands by her side as if switching a good face upon the look of things, and went to the door.

It was tall, gentle, beautiful Miss Waide—Grace Waide.

“Dear me, Mrs. Ockleshaw,” whispered Grace, as she

bent forward to the little woman; "he's not worse, I hope?"

"Oh, Sam's betterin'; but it's not colliers on'y as fall in wi' falls, miss. Cross o'er, Miss Grace! Come in; tha ought to want no askin'," said Nance, once more needlessly sweeping the shining rush-bottom chair with her apron. "Such a catch-place for dust! It comes like pepper out o' nowheer—'less it's from yon smokes."

Grace sat.

"Oh, ay, Sam's mendin'—isn't tha, lad?"

"A bit," replied Sam, keeping his confusion faced to the wall.

Grace gazed like a detective at the little woman, shook her head with playful reproach, lifted her forefinger to both of her own blue eyes, shook the finger, and poised her head in the direction of Nance in a way that distinctly implied, "Naughty little woman! Naughty! You've been crying!"

"Oh, tha'rt quite right, Miss Grace," openly said Nance. "Aw've had a shower. But there's two kinds o' tears, an' one kind pays up for t'other. It's glad uns aw've had this mornin'. As aw tell'd thee, colliers are not the only ones as gets falls; there's all sorts o' falls—windfalls (we know nowt o' them), falls i' love, and falls out, an' it's a bit o' both this aifternoon wi' us. Our Rache had a rub an' tiff, Miss Grace. Britton Lloyd and her fell out; this aifternoon they fell in—they've made it up—an' if tha'd a-bin three minutes sooner tha'd have seed and 'eard someut as had a-done thy sort o' kind heart good. Hey my, but, miss!—it—it mak's a mass o' difference in life does a bit o' love. Is it true, Miss Grace—an' yo'll excuse *me*—as *tha'rt* engaged?"

Sensitive Grace flushed, hurt.

"How folks do talk! They tell'd me it wor settled wi' young Mester Harry—Beckerton Owd Hall."

Grace closed her blue eyes as if they were flowers, strained forward her contracted lips into a carnation bud, and slowly shook her head, until even her full, half-free, flossy, glowing hair quivered with her mute emotional denial.

"That's what *aw* said," confirmed Nance, as Grace rose. "Of course, one body's likin' isn' another's; but

gie *me* the Vicar's curate, Mester Rew; aw never see his face but what aw think o' our Savyur."

"Now, mother—mother!" called Sam, looking round from the wall, and Grace also looked confused by the shock of the sudden, frank thought, which was all the more effective for being true.

"What's wrong?" asked Nance of both of them. "What is wrong? If pictures call Him to mind, surely man, made i' the likeness of His own image, can? It's no harm of unreverence i' my mind, I can tell thee, Sam. No, no, Miss Grace."

"Are you easier to-day?" asked Grace, moving nearer the bed.

Sam turned the clothes down a little, but looked at the ceiling, as he answered:

"Easier, thank thee, Miss Waide; but I weary of it. If mind were ill wi' th' body, time wouldn' seem so long."

"How do you mean?" pleasantly asked Grace.

"The mind's goin' like our shaft-engine, but the body's as still as engine-house walls."

"He thinks heaps, miss, does Sam. He's far on in that line—ahead of any on us in that. Ye'll catch him thinkin' out in his sleep at times."

Grace stood considering. Once more the ardour to do something even more practical than she had ever done before came to her. She thought of her father, of the Brooksters, but more warmly than anything she again thought of this bright, intelligent-looking crippled Sam, of his anxious little mother Nance, and she nervously asked:

"May I come and read to you some afternoon?"

"'Bozzes by Sketch' he he's bin readin', Miss Grace," put in delighted little Nance.

Sam laughed almost as heartily as if he were well, and Grace taxed her will to her utmost to keep her lips out of a smile, but the smile shot up into her eyes just as they met Sam's.

"Tha means 'Sketches by Boz,' mother."

"Well, it shows aw'm not far wrong for thee to know what aw do mean. Come, an' welcome, Miss Grace! Sam theer will be on'y too glad, aw know."

"Have you read 'The Pilgrim's Progress'?" Grace asked, as a bashful experiment, just to feel her way.

"An' 'Holy War,' too, Miss Waide, thank ye. I like——"

"Read, miss!" exclaimed Nance, to help Miss Waide's good impression. "Read? Parli'ments, meetin's, sarrmons, towns councils—he *mun* hev his weekly paper, if he borrows it. We could let him out i' penny numbers. But tha wert readin' Testament last neight, Sam; an' there wor a time back, miss, when he didn' use to touch it. But our Rache wor readin' out some Epistle o' James—weren't it, Sam?—on'y last neight, and of his own askin'. Come, an' welcome, Miss Grace! Tha'll hev a list'ner i' Sam, aw promise thee. But aw'd like my mester to hear thee as well, Miss Grace; so if he's in, go on; don't mind, just yo' go on. Just afore tea would catch him."

"Let Miss Waide come when she can, mother."

"Tha's thinkin' on'y of thysen, Sammy, lad; aw'm thinkin' all round. Thy fayther can do wi' a bit o' ccn-
viction. When we wor first married, Miss Grace, he wor chapel; then he wor church; now he's neether, an' th' years are comin' o'er him, Miss Grace—they're comin' o'er. If tha could gi'e him a bit o' thy own trewly Christian name—*tha* understans me—aw wouldn' think so much on him i' th' pit as aw do. Coal-pit's bad enough, but t'other pit of the hereafter, wheer coal's on fire, scares me when aw think on my man Ned an' his unconvictions. He's as good an' sound at heart as a pippin apple. That's the mischief on it. But he's split wi' chapel *and* church for someut; preachin' all on the side o' the masters he once said—wasn' it, Sam? Tha knows clearer nor aw do.—For my own part, Miss Grace, if he brings me seven-an'-twenty shillin' a week clear, aw can praise God, mester, an' man."

Grace went away, thinking deeply; thinking as she had often thought before, but more warmly; thinking of her father as vicar of a church, as a man in the world; as an ordained interpreter of the moral relationship between God and man, and man and man.

On the way to the canal path her heart sank in secret tragic dejection as she thought of the actual facts of the private and public history of the parish as she then read them. She halted under the same little bridge where Britton Lloyd and Rachel had halted. She stood gazing at the same water and sunlight, and what took place

between them, took place between her and her deeper, ever-urgent Spirit—a reconciliation, a plighted troth. She would have no further quarrel with the profounder Christian love of her being; she and it would be at one. Henceforth she would be true to the logical interpretation of the Gospel according to the light of God in her soul, rather than according to the acts of man in treaty with the ways of the world. God helping her, she would speak out: she would do; she would be.

CHAPTER VII

ON THE LAWN

A WEEK later there was a garden-party on the long oval lawn at Beckerton Old Hall. The enclosing rhododendron bushes were in lavender bloom; the mignonette-beds, after a shower in the morning, were yielding the very essence of their odour to the afternoon sun, to which the ladies, in their first butterfly costumes of the year, added occasional wafts of jockey club, wild rose, and cherry blossom; while, not to be outdone, a white hawthorn-tree, that was out of sight, despatched on every breeze a perfumed hint of its presence to all whom it might concern, as they socially chatted and gave smile for smile on terrace and lawn.

Carriage after carriage drove up with guests, and filed in waiting order some distance away on the high road.

Compact Mr. Brookster, in black and lavender gloves; his son Harry, a fair, semi-military, gray-eyed, handsome fellow, in London's latest and longest frock-coat and slate-coloured kids; Mrs. Brookster, blooming in plum colour; and her daughters, Dora and Bertha, in apple-blossom gowns and wide-sweeping straw hats of cream, with big-eyed marguerites—these received the guests with all the music-like charm, the swan-like grace, the beauty and the bounty, of superfine life on the higher grade.

The Rev. Egerton Waide, M.A., and his tall, thoughtful, sensitive daughter Grace were there, of course. So also, though not quite as a matter of course, was the Rev. Charles Rew, B.A., the black-bearded young curate.

This, alas, was Mr. Rew's first garden-party—that is, his first truly grand affair—where individual success and the success of the whole, the joy of the guests and the joy of the hosts, depended upon delicacy of personal bearing, good form in more senses than one, lucidity of mind and matter, resulting in pellucid conversation, smiles, etc., rather than upon that full and free dumb show of the physique which he far more comfortably displayed at the customary little parties of merely villa lawn-tennis. He was too much in earnest, too tremulously uneasy, on that lawn of Beckerton Old Hall, as he was on the day that he first went up to try for his B.A., and failed on account of his nerves.

Mr. Waide, Grace, and Mr. Rew represented the Church. But State was represented by a majority of about sixty—landowners, millowners, colliery proprietors, country gentlemen, bankers, and ladies, each after his own kind.

None but the Brooksters knew the why and wherefore of this gathering of the wealth and influence of the district, yet both young and old watched with decorous keenness the movements of Mr. Harry. Eyes were needles, and he was the pole.

It seemed quite possible, even probable, that where Mr. Harry stood and smiled the orange blossom might spring up and bloom. It was noted with interest that he had a damask rose in his buttonhole instead of his unfailing Star of Bethlehem; and those ladies who had roses—roses real or roses artificial, roses of any kind about them—were relieved, even secretly proud, because they had by good chance hit upon the official sentiment of the day.

Now, Grace Waide had roses—damask roses—in her hat; but she was the only person who did not note the peculiar coincidence. Even her father was pleasantly touched. He was almost tempted to make a playful private allusion to the point to Mrs. Brookster; but he held his peace.

Another man who noted it with emotion—but from the other side of the heart, as it were—was unheroic, self-obliterating, self-consuming, self-agonizing Mr. Rew, the curate, and when he saw fair and tall Mr. Harry Brookster, standing like a bent poplar in a dress-coat, putting

all the pleasantry he could into his speech, and all the beauty of line into his face and moustache, and all the splendour of curve into his form in front of Grace, who was uncomfortably conspicuous in a low garden-seat in the centre of the wide horseshoe shape of the setting of chairs, Mr. Rew gave himself up as lost. He was certain that the Church could not fight with the State.

Mrs. Brookster approached Mr. Rew at that palpitating moment, and with much cruelty made it an obligation on his part to talk and smile.

Gratefully, for his own mood, he thought of something serious; he spoke of the recent "falls" at No. 2 pit, and he was about to go into some exceedingly pathetic detail, when, by a most subtle clouding of the sunshine of Mrs. Brookster's face, he perceived that something was a little out of tone—indiscreet, perhaps not quite in the best taste on that particular occasion. But what? He did not know.

And not in the best taste on any other occasion, really, for if there was one commodity which all the Brooksters, with the exception of Mr. Brookster, did not like to hear about or talk about, it was—COAL.

That was strange, considering everything. It was coal that paid for Beckerton Old Hall; it was coal that paid the servants; paid for the horses and carriages; clothed and fed Mr. and Mrs. Brookster, their two daughters, and their son. Indeed, it was coal, and nothing but coal, that made life at the rate of some thousands per year in the country, in town, at the seaside, and on the Continent, financially possible to all of them. True, they had Home, Australian, and American "investments," but it was coal that fed even them. Had the Brooksters set up a black graven calf of coal and worshipped it, it would have been an almost sensible idolatry, considering the facts.

But Mr. Rew, spending most of his life among tradespeople, miners, and factory hands, who so very frankly acknowledged what coal did for them, was not vividly aware of the attitude of reserve on the point upon the higher grade. The pity of it was, he wanted to put himself right. Quite a novel idea came to him. He was so thankful. His dark eyes sparkled—*this* would please her, and he began:

"Is it not remarkable, is it not really wonderful to think of, Mrs. Brookster, that at this very moment—away down, right beneath us—men are working inside the earth—just like ants!"

"Eh—, y—es," she muttered coldly.

"Really marvellous!" he added, in his richest tones of admiration for the mysteries of the universe, to try to warm her.

But Mrs. Brookster was chilled; she coolly looked over his shoulder at Mr. Alfred Dawbairn, of Hockley Lodge, conversing with Dora, and was soon warmly speaking to that youthful middle-aged gentleman about his recent visit to the Holy Land.

Suddenly, as when a shaft of wind rustles the barley and leaves it quiet again, there was a well-suppressed flutter and rustle of observation, accompanied by a lipless whisper here and there. Lo, Miss Waide had risen from her chair and was going with Mr. Harry Brookster up the steps leading from the lawn to the terrace.

This was quite an unanticipated step on the part of Mr. Harry. Mrs. Brookster herself was surprised. He was surely not going to hasten affairs by a week or two? Surely not.

"Harry is going to show his new St. Bernard," remarked Mrs. Brookster to a group of ladies.

But the ladies were sceptical. Good breeding made them receive Mrs. Brookster's statement without protest; nevertheless, they did not believe it. They had well-based theories of their own.

A lull came over things. No one could talk with the early vivacity. Lucidity of mind and matter had gone. There was the sensation of waiting for a verdict. Eyes were fixed in the direction of the right-hand terrace. Even ears seemed to be pricked that way. Mr. Waide, Mr. Brookster, and one or two elderly men, were the only beings on the ground who could speak with vigour—and that was forced.

At last inspiration returned. Mr. Harry and Miss Waide appeared round the terrace again. Like the flutterings of birds went the muffled whispers:

"It's off!"

"It's nothing!"

" She—won't ! "

And that was perfectly true. Mr. Harry, acting in his own time and way, had actually proposed. But still more marvellous, Miss Waide, acting in her own time and way, had actually declined.

Nevertheless, in keeping with the superfine yet cruel law of appearances, Mr. Harry and Grace had to walk back among their friends just as if they had simply verified the fact that Alp, the new St. Bernard, was the very loveliest animal of his kind in all the world.

It was peculiar, but the grand garden-party lost grip of itself after that. Individually and collectively it seemed to swoon, and everybody was trying to put nerve into somebody else.

Not a word was uttered upon the subject of Mr. Harry or Grace, and yet everybody knew. A desperate, spasmodic effort at vivacity passed between hosts and guests, and guests and hosts ; but it was a failure, and the whole gathering seemed to mutely pass a resolution that it was only decent to relieve the Brooksters, and especially poor Mr. Harry, from the obligation to look pleasant ; and forthwith a highly discreet lady with three beautiful daughters won distinction by being the first to show the guests the way from Beckerton Old Hall to their carriages.

Grace drove home with her father and Mr. Rew in an old Beckerton-beyond-Brow four-wheeler. Her father and Mr. Rew tried hard to confirm each other in the over-generous statement that the party had been delightful—a most enjoyable affair from beginning to end.

Grace, silent, depressed, listened to them. She knew that they were lying, absolutely lying : her father, to consider the Brooksters ; Mr. Rew, to consider her father. The wish for candour, honesty, truth, both in them and herself, verily longed in her.

" I have *not* enjoyed it," she said, with the candour of grief.

" My dear ! " said her father, as if she had renounced one of the Commandments.

" It is true, father ; I have not."

As if in pathetic search of the truth, the whole truth, he appealed :

" Why ? "

Grace knew that he already knew why. This hurt her so keenly that she could not reply. Her eyes moved to the cab window to try and get away from a painful reality to some comforting dream. But there were grim realities outside, too. Yes, there they were—the tall, black-breathing chimneys, the white gaspings of steam-pipes, the whizzing winding-wheels of the pits, the lank, lean, dirty-white tow-horses, the weather-reddened men and women of the canal boats, and the browned, clay-splashed makers of bricks.

They travelled in silence. Speech was there, but so also was the Vicar's discretion.

As Grace continued to gaze out of the window, the sad expression on her face made Mr. Rew sorry for her. He knew that she had "views"—that her sympathy was on the side of the worker, and so forth; but he then, for the first time, began to suspect that she was in protest, that she not only judged the Brooksters, but judged her father, and judged him. It was a pity; it was awkward. He was no sooner rid of one difficulty (Mr. Harry) than here was another. He could go with her a little of the way into these outside subjects; but, after all, her father was his Vicar, and it was his duty to work in harmony with his chief. She was a most lovable being—the making of quite a model wife for a vicar—but "views" were so dangerous for a man who wanted to get on; and the cab stopped.

Mr. Waide wished his curate good-afternoon at the Vicarage gate. Under ordinary circumstances he would have been asked in to tea, but Mr. Waide wanted to have a most serious talk with Grace. The poor child surely could hardly know what she had that afternoon really done.

CHAPTER VIII

IN THE STUDY

GRACE hastened upstairs to change. She locked her door. The instant that she turned from the door, quite alone, a most violent throb of emotion shook her. The hitherto

checked tears now freely flowed, and in a moment her tall, sensitive form was bent, and she was sobbing—thinking of the terrible disappointment to her father. She knew his wish, knew his thoughts, knew his love for her; and yet she had that day set them all aside. She had to do; she could not help it.

With her thin face pale and drenched with her still flowing tears, she looked up at the portrait of her dead mother as at the helpful picture of a Madonna. She stared at it. What would her dear mother have wished? What would she have thought?

Oh, it was bitterness added to bitterness! Her own mother was the daughter of a great mill-owner. She was born in wealth; she was bred in it, and had married into the Church—transforming in a single day, it was said, her father from a poor curate into a rich vicar, for they no sooner married than he got a church; and—so Grace had grown to believe—from that day he virtually ceased to preach the Gospel to the poor, and tempered it for the rich.

She felt it all as if slow brooding, observing, and thinking had culminated in a single day's revelation. Many a household like the Ockleshaws' had opened her eyes, opened her mind, opened her heart. Something was wrong! No wonder so very few miners and mill hands went to church, and so many went to the Ebenezer, the Salem, and the Bethel chapels. In the church—in All Souls', at least; and that was the only church she knew—the Gospel was preached for the successful shopkeepers, mine and mill officials, mine and mill owners, land-owners, etc. True, they had "collections for the poor"; nevertheless, something was wrong. Why *were* the poor poor—many of them, at least? Some were poor because they always would be poor; but many, ay, very many—how very many!—were poor because they had no chance, year in, year out, to be anything else. They were *kept* poor; it was grind, grind, everlasting grind!

Her hands clasped her brow. Where was thought leading? Was she really in the right? or was she, alas! in the wrong after all?

"Dear God!" she cried, as in her garden-party costume—yes, even in her garden-party hat—she fell on her knees

by the bed. "Oh, Thou Spirit who rulest over all, look down, I beseech thee—guide me—rule me—lead me! Am I thinking according to Thy way? Am I acting according to Thy will—Thy word? Is pity right? is right right? is love? Or is it just to be *unjust*? Is——"

There was a knock at the door.

Grace still knelt, but silent. The knock had suddenly recalled her to the binding local domestic facts of her daily Vicarage life again.

There was a more urgent knock.

"Grace?" her father called.

"Yes," she answered, rising. New strength glowed within her.

"Are you—unwell?"

"No, no, father——"

"I want to speak to you. Will you be long?"

"I will come now," she answered, taking off her hat; but her father did not wait, he retreated in advance to his study.

Grace soon followed.

"Grace dear," he at once said, with self-conscious pathos, from his chair at the desk as she closed the study door, "I do not think you are treating me with—candour."

Grace went to the mantelboard and leaned there, looking down into the fire. Tears—not of penitence, not of protest, but of sorrow—came to her eyes. She wished to speak, but could not; she could only lift her little laced handkerchief to her eyes, and the wood-violet scent with which she had sprinkled it for the garden-party now most keenly annoyed her. But that very annoyance gave her nerve.

"Something occurred this afternoon," continued her father, "which I ought to know."

"You—know—it—already—father," she slowly answered, tearfully implying that that was surely enough.

"Only by surmise. That is it—only by surmise. *Did* Mr. Harry speak to you?" inquired the Vicar.

"He did, father!" she replied, hastening across the floor, bending to him in his chair, and putting her arms around his neck. "And I *had* to decline—I could not help it. I could not help it!"

"But, Grace, dear child," he said, smoothing her light,

ruddy, fluffy hair from her brow, "it is serious—very serious. I do not think you know how serious. I was consulted. I approved. I gave my word. I was committed. I thought there was no doubt. It was such a very excellent thing—for us ; and especially for you."

Her arms tightened about him in love, in pity. She kissed his cheek ; her old sobbing returned, her face was buried on his breast ; but she struggled through her sobs to appeal :

"Do not blame me too soon, father dear . . . not *too* soon. . . . Wait. . . . I do not think you quite understand. . . . We do not see things in the same way."

"Well?" he said a little sharply, meaning that he was quite ready to be enlightened from quite a new source.

"My sympathies are all—the other way."

"How do you mean?" he asked provokingly, thinking that she referred to his curate.

"*You* understand," she pitifully said, unable to get her many thoughts into one.

"I do not, my child. How *do* you mean your 'sympathies—all—*the—other—way*'?"

"With the—with other classes—the workers."

Mr. Waide opened his eyes and moved back his chair, as if he were possessed by an exclamation too big to be exclaimed.

Grace followed him up—even fell on her knees, and renewed her embrace, as he said :

"My—dear, *dear* child—what—*what* do you mean? We are *all* workers—*all* labourers—*all* in the vineyard."

"So it is said, father ; but only said," she now explained, with unconscious frankness. "Is that believed? Is that acted upon? While the many are working at the roots of the vine, the few are eating the grapes."

"Grace, what have you been reading? Some of that vile stuff that is scattered broadcast to set class against class."

"No, oh no. I know nothing of that—nothing. Though class is already against class—the rich against the poor—even the Church against the——"

"Grace, Grace—Grace! Who has been talking this to you? Not Mr. Rew, surely? He is sounder than that, I hope! Some political ranter—some half-educated

Radical fellow in Vicar's Croft, Shaw's Court, or Brookster's Yard; a fellow like that Ned Ockleshaw, whose very head will tell you what he is. Grace, I'm surprised. Surprised! Disappointed. Shocked! Hurt. . . . Really hurt! . . . And all the Brooksters have been so exceedingly good to us—to you especially. They're good, though, to everybody—to everybody. See what they give—five, ten, and fifteen pounds at a time. Most charitable they are. They certainly make money, but they spend it; more, they give it; and it might easily be otherwise, for they have a right to do what they like with their own."

Grace's soul verily danced within her for the joy of its own courage.

"With their *own*," she answered quietly, with a gentle, sweet dauntlessness as she withdrew her arms from her father, rose, and stood by the mantelboard again. She was calm, almost happy—with a still clearer spiritual vision and strength that had come to her.

Yes, God had answered. She was indeed seeing things rightly; she was indeed acting in accordance with the clearer and more truly Christian light. Her own father had become entangled in the world, in the social, the official—yes, the ecclesiastical—meshes of his own Church. The Church got its support from land, from property, from wealth; therefore it and its members took the side of land, property, and wealth. They were supposed to be impartial, but they were not. She saw it all: it was wrong—it was sinful—it was against both the spirit and the letter of the Church's own Scripture—its own Prayer-book; and here and there, she was sure, against the consciences of its own true members. But, God helping her, she would stand firm, and she would pray to Him to touch her father's heart, as He had touched hers—not, as her father thought, by random reading here and random talking there; but simply by the logical revelation of life—of facts—and the logical revelation of that Word which her own father read aloud and preached.

"'With their own'?" repeated her father, in Grace's implying tone. "What do you mean? Explain yourself."

Grace looked into the fire. Self-consciousness had returned. Her heart was throbbing.

"Well?" he urged, thinking that she was confused;

but she repeated with the gentle, trembling emotion of one newly appointed to duty by Fate :

“ ‘ Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth : and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord.’ I believe—that. I see it. I see it day after day——”

There was a knock at the door. A maid entered and addressed Mr. Waide :

“ Mrs. Rushton’s girl, sir.”

“ What Rushton ? ”

“ Atherton Row, sir.”

“ I’m engaged. Ask what she wants.”

The maid went and returned, explaining in a low, bashful way :

“ Her mother asks for the loan of the baby clothes—the confinement linen, sir.”

“ Look at that ! ” said Mr. Waide to Grace. “ That’s a specimen. I dare say if her husband drank less he would be able to fit his wife out as she ought to be. Tell the girl I’ll send Mr. Rew.”

“ I know the case,” remarked Grace, and the maid waited. “ Her husband’s an engine-man. He has been out of work three weeks.”

“ Is he steady when he’s *in* ? ”

“ He is a decent, striving, hard-working fellow—when he has anything to strive on—and the house is a picture.”

“ Oh, I beg his pardon, then ! ” said Mr. Waide, with diplomatic sincerity. “ You know where the bundle is, Jane. Let the girl have it. But the last time it went to Atherton Row the woman pawned it, so we must watch.”

When the study door was closed he added, rather severely, even in his own opinion, but there was too much oratorical enjoyment in the delivery to resist :

“ They’re a set of scoundrels, most of them.”

“ No, no, father ! ” said Grace ; “ the marvel is that they are not. Some are, because they cannot fight against what the others, by very hard striving, do fight against. No, no, no, father ! The lower class of labour is not *paid* for. Something is given on account, as it were, but fully paid in proportion to value and results it is not. Masters take too much.”

"Nonsense, child, non—sense! These are the economic laws which you are naturally ignorant of. It's a case of supply and demand—supply and demand!" he repeated, as if the problem were both as profound and as simple to the initiated as A B C. "Supply and demand! You can't get beyond that. It's based upon the economic laws."

"Which are not necessarily moral laws—truly Christian laws. Six men might make what they call economic laws, but six millions cannot make the moral law. It is made by God; but, unfortunately, men can *unmake* it—for a time—but for a time only! The sin will find them out."

By intensifying degrees Mr. Waide looked at Grace, as if verifying the doubtful fact as to whether this was or was not his own daughter Grace. Staring at her as if she had become a stranger, he rose. He stroked his white beard. His brow suddenly turned red, and he smoothed back his white hair. He walked to the study door; then back again, muttering:

"So, so. It has come to this? Come to this! . . . I must . . . speak to you at another time. . . . I cannot now. . . . Leave me a little . . . leave me."

Grace impulsively ran and kissed him; she passionately embraced him, freed herself from his unyielding firmness, and sorrowfully went towards the door. He gazed at her going; his eyes gleamed with emotion, with struggling truth. Looking at her was like looking back on himself when he was her age, when he was first ordained.

The door was quietly closed upon him. He walked to and fro again; he was really walking back into his past and out of it again. He stood staring—staring at the wall. His eyes moved upon a faded photograph of himself as a young man, as a curate. Fresh tears started. Yes, yes; history was repeating itself. *He* cherished these inspiring views then; *he* was enthusiastic, fervent in spirit, free, untrammelled, independent, conscientious, and truly sympathetic then; *he* was on the side of the workers, the doers, the poor, the oppressed. And *then* he was happy, struggling to be just, preaching not only the gospel of the nobility of all labour, but the hope of justice; nay, preaching the firm belief that justice would prevail, and make the way easier for the righteousness of life. But—now—now!

Into his chair he sank ; down upon his desk he bent his head ; his white hair fell over ; he clasped his hands in it, and murmured his agony of self-reproach.

CHAPTER IX

ON THE PIT BANK

WHILE the Vicar's white head was bent upon his desk there came a hasty rapping of knuckles at the door, and the maid stepped in.

The Vicar looked up, dazed, and his head and beard were rough. Jane was startled, but she stood her ground, and said :

" Help's wanted, sir ! No. 1 pit's in flood. Miss Grace has just gone, so has Mr. Rew ; but I thought I'd better tell you. Aren't you feeling well, sir ? "

" In flood ? No. 1 ? " he muttered, as if from some No. 1 pit of conscience of his own. But he was soon in the street, soon hurrying on with the crying, shouting, muttering, bareheaded, bewildered women, followed by children who were warned back, but who, crying, would not go back, and ran on like panting, bleating lambs at some mysterious changing of pastures.

Every house-door was open ; courts and yards seemed to belch people ; women, and still more women, came out ; old men struggled forward ; resting miners ran almost straight from their beds, and invalids and cripples peered out of bedroom windows away across the black ground and through the reddening light of the setting sun to the shaft of No. 1, that stood black against the sky like a gigantic gibbet.

A woman fell reeling, faint ; another lost her shawl from about herself and baby, and yet did not miss it in her wild, bird-like half-run, half-flight along the path leading to the banks. On they went, some clogless, but in stockings ; some barefooted, some partly dressed, some straight from washing themselves, and with their hair down ; a few wild and hysterical ; others as if dumb ; others as if deaf ; some even as if blind, and following on by

faith and sound ; but all with the wan fever of wondering as to whose man was alive, and whose man dead, trapped by the water under the ground.

Up to the little canal bridge they ran, impatient because there was a glut at its mouth, and they had to cross slowly in a thin long mass, like carded wool through a narrow hole. Once free of the bridge, they sped across the black and lumpy refuse ground and partly up the hills of banks like flies.

There they were held back, otherwise it seemed as if the shaft would be choked with women rashly and piteously seeking their own.

To every batch of new arrivals word was passed on from rear to rear that thirty men were in the flooded diggings, off the main digging, and shut in.

Newly-arrived women, overcome by this information, fell upon each other's necks, and the collective murmur of them was such as if the thirty men were there and then being shot dead before their eyes.

At last a cage of men and boys came up from the free parts of the pit, and wives, mothers, sisters, fathers, brothers, picked their own out with spasmodic rushes, and clung to them as if, come what might, never, never again would they be parted with to go down that murderous shaft again.

To see the inter-knit ties of life veritably quiver in kinship was like seeing the twitches of a circle of people under an electric shock, only instead of laughs and shouts of enjoyment there were tears and the moanings and mutterings of pain as of both body and soul. Nothing could still the waiting creatures' nerves ; teeth chattered, noses suddenly bled, faces twitched, knees gave way as if disjoined, the victims sat on the ground trembling, awaiting the return of strength and the calmer throbbing of the heart. Some, under the uncontrollable play of their nerves, even lifted stones and squeezed them in strife ; buttons were unconsciously torn off, and the braid of jackets were unknowingly ripped, while quiet-gazing babies were violently hugged and re-hugged, and yet lugged again, kissed and re-kissed in the very desperation of life and love.

Two women in the crowd lost their wits, one dropping her child and leaving it, another struggling to snatch a

child from the arms of a mother under the illusion that it was her "wage boy"—her own Tommy—her lad—her son—but now, to her, "a baby in arms again."

It was a twilight gathering of distracted beings in the pangs of appeal for the propitiation of the gods of both good and evil—the gods in heaven, the gods above the earth, and the gods within the earth, the gods of flood, air, fire, and rock; ay, for the pitiful propitiation of all the forces of all the elements and materials of Fate. It was a united prayer of individual prayers, of sobs and silence, of tears and cries, that Nature would have mercy and hold off its smothering waters and suffocating fumes from the fathers and sons trapped below and wanting to breathe the rare, rare breath of life and to see the faces in their homes again.

The slow methodical shaft of the great pump itself was like the lethargic arm of some indifferent mechanical god, with its languid rise and fall, instead of with quick, eager beats in sympathy with the beats of human hearts on the bank.

And yet the great arm was doing its giant's work, if only inch by inch. Inch by inch the water retreated like a mastered tide from the narrow dark shore of the slanting cutting; and at the tide's very edge were daring men, their own lives momentarily at the mercy of events, eager to press forward, when the depth of water would allow, to the side passage where the miners were shut off—singing! singing like a far-off choir that had been embedded in the earth with the coal during prehistoric times; singing their gratitude for their safety up to then, and for the prospect of deliverance in the distant voices of their calling mates; singing in pathetic heartiness and unison.

"Praise God, from whom all blessings flow,
Praise Him, all creatures here below,
Praise Him above, ye heavenly host,
Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost."

One of the men at the water's edge was Ned Ockleshaw, of Brookster's Yard. He knew nothing of the fate of Britton Lloyd (who had that very morning started on day shift), but for the sake of Nance and Rachel he sent up word that he and Britton were safe; that Britton, in fact,

could be heard singing in the T jigger as if he didn't want to come out.

The message was delivered to the crowd; the crowd passed it on; it found Nance and Rachel at the very moment that Grace Waide found them. And little Nance, overcome, turned aside and cried into her apron, and in Grace's ready arms:

"Thank Thee, good Lord! Aw wish aw could divide some o' my comfort wi' the poor folk who has none!"

CHAPTER X

THE DOMESTIC TRAGEDY

EARLY on the morning after the flooding of No. 1 pit, when the crows of Beckerton Old Hall rookery were cawing over the quiet fields of Greigson's farm, when Mr. and Mrs. Brookster, Master Harry, Dora, and Bertha were as quietly asleep as the daisies, five corpses were carried into a shed near the engine-house of No. 1.

There were three men and two youths—grim, stark, white with death, black with coal-dust, sodden with water, naked to the waist; two with their lamps still in their hands; one the contorted shape of a delirious struggle; one with his hands clutching his hair—and all with the thoughts of home struck dead upon their faces.

One of these forms was carried into a cottage around the corner from Brookster's Yard, into the house of a young wife with a baby at the breast and three young children about her knees.

Nance Ockleshaw soon ran the three children from the cottage, up Brookster's Yard, and into her own house, and asked Sam "to sit up in bed and give 'em someut to think on."

Rachel attempted to take the baby from the young mother, but Nance tugged Rachel's apron, caught Rachel's glance, and by a most expressive contraction of one side of the face made Rachel understand that the creature would be all the better with her new bairn to cling to.

Then Nance and three other women affectionately hustled the young wife into the little back-kitchen, away

from the unsightly form that was being placed upon the long dresser; and not until busy and willing neighbours had made the form more presentable did they permit the appealing new widow to approach.

"Bob, lad!—Bob!—Bob!" the widow cried. "When thy bairns call for thee, what mun aw say? When aw call thee mysen, what mun aw say?"

Nance and two other women coaxed her away as she muttered:

"Oh, women, women, aw think as aw doated on him too much—more nor I can now bear to do wi'out!" and she swooned.

Rachel took the young baby, Bob, from her two clasping arms like a nut from its husk, while Nance and the other women placed the fainting creature on a chair near the door to catch the fresh morning air.

"Come, come, Mrs. Gummidge," said Nance, like a living tonic, when the woman revived. "It's hard, we know it's hard; but tha mun meet the worst wi' th' best, lass. Poor Mrs. Tweddell, of Bank Row, is worse nor thee by one, for they've tuk both man *and* son hom' to her; her poor man wi' his tuk brok'—and thy Bob here *is* whole. Think o' th' bairns; think o' thysen. Me own fayther wor killed i' the self-same No. 1—it's had many and many a man—and me own mother's tow'd me oft and oft that on'y for thinkin' o' me and six others she'd ha' had no wits to think on nowt. Think o' th' childer—hey, bless that babs!—he's sleepin' through it all like a good example; think of Liz, and Jimmy, and——"

"Bob! Bob! Bob!" wailed the mother, and wept worse than before. She swooned again.

She cried in her swoon like a child in a dream. Suddenly her body writhed, her hands twisted into knots of joints, her face turned yellow, her lips white, her eyes stood fixed.

"Her's badly," muttered one of the women.

"Her is," said the second.

"Lord 'a mercy! her's deein'," whispered Nance.

Grace appeared at the door.

"Miss?" asked Nance, gazing hard. "Is it thee? Aw thought thee wor Mrs. Gummidge's angil comed for her, aw did?"

"Poor Mrs. Gummidge is ill," said Grace, stepping in.

Nance felt the woman's brow.

"The Lord be with us! Her's gone; her's not i' this life!"

It was true. The young mother was dead.

One more sorrowful duty was before the neighbours, and just as they finished placing the dead form on the bed upstairs, a messenger came for Nance and Rachel. It was old Daniel. He had just heard that Britton Lloyd had been found—alive, but with only an inch or two of water between him and death.

Rachel, with the baby in her arms, hastened off to Brookster's Yard.

Britton was not there, but was expected; and she paced the floor too excited to croon to the baby, nursing it in the strained silence of momentary hope and fear, while Sam, sitting up in bed, amused the other three children with shadows of rabbits, foxes, and geese, cast by the brilliant early summer sunbeams that were streaming through the window, upon the wall.

The wood-and-iron clang of Britton Lloyd's clogs rang upon a boulder pavement just outside of Brookster's Yard.

"Brit—ton!" Rachel called to go in advance of her as she ran to the door.

His answer came like an echo. *He* came like a vision—pale, dank, dirty, and gaunt. Rachel, with a cry, launched herself and the baby off the doorstep into his embrace, not in the least afraid, now, of the women and lasses of Brookster's Yard seeing and hearing an unmistakable double kiss.

"What meaning is *this*?" asked Britton, looking at the baby as he led Rachel in. "Hullo, Sam! *You* family man, too?"

"Ay," said Sam. "How is ta, Britton boy?"

"On the life side of the water, and that's all, Sam."

"And what more dost tha want?" asked little Nance, suddenly greeting him through his back as if he had just returned from shipwreck. "Why, tha'rt sodden damp, love lād! Get upstairs wi' thee and clap on a suit o' Sam's. Hey, God's providence, tha'st had a near touch, I hear?"

"Near touch and-go it was with me," said Britton, with Welsh good-humour. Then he abruptly saddened. "I

had fear that I never see you all again, and Wales neither, 'cept in my thoughts, and she come with her mountains down to me in water to my chin there, beautiful! Truth. Yes! Believe! My chin just float on water for the breaths of life to pass in and out of me, and dark as darkness, though it was, 'twas *then* I see Cwm Mountain and wood that is in the straight sight of my own home; and I saw it as clear and green as new grass. Truth, indeed, Rache lass! And once I was *sure* I smell smoke of wood fire along the water, as if straight from Cwm cottages—fact, Sam!—and then it was that I see more clear than you see yourself in a looking-glass, my poor old mother put lump of coal on her fire in thoughts of me: for did she not write me in her last that she never lift coals on but what she say to herself p'raps my lad's own hands dig it out of Providence for her use. Oh, I wish sore and hard that the poor body has not seen the papers, giving her anxieties and frights, and bringing her to tears till she not know whether she isn't up to her eyes in water herself."

"That's all right," said Sam. "She knows tha'rt safe. I marked a paper, and Rachel there posted it. Tha *did*, Rache?"

"Ay," answered Rache, "aw did so."

"When?"

"Last night."

"Last night? Last night?" asked Britton, mystified. "Anwyl!—but how is the papers come to know a miracle before it happen? How is the papers come to know I was safe before I know it myself? Why, last night I was drowned all the way up to my chin, I tell you—'twas last night. I think of the water spirit in my own country years ago, when they told us children that the poor spirit hangs over the falls of waters and cries in *our* language, 'Oh Dduw fra beth a wnaf?' that is, in your words, 'God! what shall I do?' for in the dead of th' dark I hear the water lick the walls—I hear it guggle and bobble in and out of holes—I hear it suck the posts and make low noise as if 'twas living, and look for the rest of me; but—please God!—the little that was left of me 'tween my chin and head was not to be for it, and, thank the Lord, here I am!"

"Here you are," said Nance, "but tha ought to be

upstairs. Go and put on a suit o' Sam's, and talk then for till tha'rt dry, the miracle tha talks about won't be finished."

"Mother," called Sam, "*door!*"

Nance went. A tall old woman in black, with black glossy hair, dark bird-like eyes, with a face as sweetly fresh, as pale and yet as flushed as a half-ripe cherry, stood there. With an effort she said:

"'Tis a son I ask for—a Britton Lloyd——"

Little Nance lifted her bare lean arms (thus ! !) in surprise, and let them drop again in greater surprise, by which brief time Britton had briskly passed her and had his arms around his "mam bach's" (dear little mother's) neck, "mam bach" murmuring out her gratitude in Welsh upon his neck, and Britton muttering confirmations and thanksgivings about her bent head, in Welsh, like the reverberating crooning of a dove.

Rachel, as if that were holy ground, turned away with her apron to her eyes' Sam tightened his lips and looked at the wall.

The only one who was sympathetic, and yet quite alive and alert, was Nance.

Even while the mother and son were in each other's prolonged embrace near the door, and Rachel and Sam were all-absorbed, the little woman with her apron dusted the armchair and the round ash table; brooded the three children from the fire into a corner as if they were chicks; put the fire-irons straight; blew the ash dust off the oven top; stroked her flaxen hair; turned her white apron like a fresh petal, and then hastened with resolute hospitality to Britton and her new guest.

"Britton love, lad, tha tak' as much askin' as a weddin' ! Aw tell thee, for the third time of askin', go upstairs and put on a suit o' Sam's—th' Sunday uns, *now*, lad—this is thy mother aw both hear and see, an' her's welcome ! Second big drawer from th' floor—and we'll talk to thee when tha'rt dry. And now, mother, now that tha sees he's safe and sound, wi' breath in him, you come here, tak' that theer easy-cheer, tha'rt right heartly welcome for thysen's sake, an' for somebody else's, and aw needn' tell thee aw mean thy lad's. Tha'st heerd o' Rachel, of course—yon's her. Come here, lass. Come to thy two

mothers. But understan' this isn' her baby bairn—bless thee, no!—the poor bairn's a sister to these three lonesome children. Two days a-back they had a fayther and a mother; to-day they're orphan'd—fayther drown'd i' No. 1, mother dead of heart shock, and now both lyin' i' th' home as if they never know'd each other."

Welsh Mrs. Lloyd understood one word out of about every twenty of all these, and her part of the conversation was confined to nodding her head and smiling when by rare good fortune a word which she knew flicked past her ear—but, alas, only to be lost with those she didn't.

"Ay, this is our Rachel—an' thine, aw hope," continued Nance, aflush with current welcoming and prospective hospitality; "and yon bed has our Sam against his will on sick-list. My man is out seein' if flood will let them work; my man's owd fayther's somewheer out, too; and we've a son Dick a sodger—and that's our family. Tak' off th' bonnet and shawl, mother; aw'll hang 'em up for thee; tha'rt tired, aw'm sure, and as it would tak' too long to get meat dinner for thee, and we're all of a mix up with other people's anxiety and our own, Rachel will get us all a cup o' tea—allus refrashin'—an' kettle's already on the sing—and, though our Rachel could do it all, for she's as housey as mysen, I'll cut bread-an'-butter just for time's sake. Maybe tha likes toast. . . . Aw say maybe tha likes toast? Toast, mother, toast? No? Tha'st not a toast folk? Then a warm ovencake? Cake? Hey? Yes?"

Mrs. Lloyd gave a triple nod and murmured in a low, grateful tone:

"Yr ydych yn bur dda" (You are very good).

"Then, tha'll have one o' my own home-makin'. Rachel wor busy ironin' when we baked last, or *she* bakes, too. Hey, but aw do wish i' my heart we know'd tha wor comin'; 'aw'd have put raisins in—they're on'y currans—for a bit more nor common Sunday use, this time tha knows. Here, little Sally Gummidge, tha'rt quite big enough to be useful; tak' this jar to Garside's—corner shop—and bring haif pound o' syrup, *and don't tha run home mind*, or tha'll miss cakes. Poor Bairn! Her *would* hev a fright. Rache, lass, give Mrs. Gummidge's babs to Sam, on to th' bed theer; and get flower-and-gold china cups

down ; *I'll* get th' cloth " ; and Nance went to the dresser-drawer herself to make quite sure that the cloth was her very best.

At the dresser she glanced at Rachel's apron ; she caught Rachel's eye ; she telegraphed—almost telephoned—a hint or two. Rachel glided into the back kitchen, and came out of it as if she had not only donned a clean apron, but also a cleaner, clearer, cheerier face, and brighter and browner eyes, and her brown hair was the brighter and smoother for a brush from the front to the plaited and coiled little hive at the back.

Just then Britton appeared in black on the stairs.

" Why," said Nance, " tha fills 'em as well as Sam does ; doesn't he, Rachel ? Go and sit nigh thy mother, an' to mak' her a bit at home here abroad, thee speak her own tongue to her ; less aw'm well mistak'n, her bonny black eye doesn' look like understandin' ours much. Hey, Britton, hers a sweet un ! *Hers* not got her face i' th' coal an' spindle lands. Her has it wheer butter comes from, aw should think. . . . Why, aw could eat dry bread, lukin' at *her*. . . . Now then, me son, none o' our broken-backed, lame-legged English betwixt thee an her ! Out with it i' plain Welsh ! Don't be ashamed. It's nat'ral food for *her* ear. Gie thy mother a bit o' mother-tongue. Here, childer ! keep thee quiet ! . . . God love 'em !—here's a curran' cake betwixt ye. Keep sittin' i' th' corner, bairns, loves, an' sit still now, whiles other folk can hear their own ears, and not think as they're som'dy else's."

" Put them up here, mother," said Sam, sitting in bed with the baby asleep across his knees. " I'll keep them quiet—babs and all."

" Well, lad, if tha will. It'll give Britton a better chance " ; and little Liz and Jimmy Gummidge were lifted on the bed, and they sat with their backs to the wall eating their cake.

" There's kettle, Rachel ! Warm th' pot—big best un ; there'll be a big dry round on us to-day. Best, lass, best ; didn't tha hear !"

Rachel warmed the big best teapot, and went to and fro preparing the oblong table by the window, while Nance was busy at the little round table cutting bread-and-butter, and keeping watch on the cakes warming in the oven.

Britton, without shyness, was freely speaking in Welsh; his mother listening—slowly shaking her head in wonderment, or muttering her gratitude, or whispering a question, or putting her hand on his knee, and lifting her white handkerchief to press her eyes; at the grateful sight of which Nance silently left the round table, went into the back-kitchen, and returned as if from chapel where the prayer had been especially touching and long.

Nance heard old Dan's clogs on the yard bricks, slipped a towel off the door-rail, met him at the door, and whispered:

"*Here, fayther, wash thysen at the stoop—an' come in—an' SHAKE HANDS—it's Britton's mother—a LOVE.*"

Dan carried out the instructions. He returned looking very much washed indeed—too much washed—as if more by force of some deluging accident than design; and having most thoughtfully combed his hair at Mrs. Booth's next door, he entered with such a sudden and abrupt look of grotesque freshness about his face and head, that Nance tittered so much over a transformation more complete than she expected, that she thought it best to be quite frank, and openly said:

"Well, fayther, tha's done it this time! . . . Here's fayther's fayther, Mrs. Lloyd. . . . Come *along*, fayther!—fayther's fayther, Mrs. Lloyd—tha mun excuse him—he's had a wash an' comb—he has a more homelier look nor this betimes. Give the owd lady thy hand, fayther.—she wanna keep it . . . that's more like! . . . and now make thysen useful, fayther . . . let me see . . . Britton's mother's, *one*; Britton hissen, *two*; Rache, *three*; thysen, *four*; and mysen, *five*; Ned aw won't expect . . . fayther, bring two front-bedroom cheers down; an' listen, see that they're not merely legs and back; bring 'em wi' someut to sit on."

By the time the bedroom chairs were down, the tea was ready. Nance sat at the head of the table, nearest the fireplace; Britton's mother on her left, opposite the window; Britton next to his mother, and Rachel and old Dan at the foot.

Sally Gummidge was given a piece of bread with a golden mirror of syrup on it, and told to sit on the iron stool by the fire. Liz and Jimmy were still concerned in cake on

the bed ; the baby, fast asleep, was tucked-in near Sam ; and Sam sat up with his tea on a little iron tray on his knees.

Every soul of them was lovingly happy. Even sad memories seemed to be shut out from those homely social moments—fragrant with buttered tea-cakes ; aromatic with especially strong tea ; festive, for that occasion only, with cream ; luscious with the jar of golden syrup ; and, for Britton's mother's sake, with a small pot of black-currant jelly, turned out on a saucer, and quivering and gleaming there as with the sensitive emotion of each and all.

They were happy, even to the quickening of their breath, the brightening of their eyes, the flushing of their faces, little Nance herself being in such a summer-heat of generous hospitable feeling that she forgot her own appetite, and finally lost it in her vivid consciousness of everybody else's.

" Now, mam bach " (dear little mother), said Britton Lloyd, " you try Mrs. Ockleshaw's cakes."

" Yes, marm bark ! " called Nance, in automatic imitation. " Try them—put thy hand out—help thysen—all here's thine—and there's more in t'oven. Pass Dan the plate, Britton, lad ; let his cake keep thy mother's company ; the sight o' one allus helps off t'other. Tak' one thysen, Britton ; and Rachel, lass, art ta beginnin' wi' plain bread-an'-butter ? Well, it's like thee ; it's thrifty, like ; aw'm allus pleased to see it i' young uns. Sam ! aw'm forgettin' thee. Cake, lad ? "

" No, mother, I've plenty, and plain food for me in bed."

" And out, for that matter," said Nance. " Flies would fatten to birds if all folk left 'em as much o' the sugar and sweets o' things as tha does. Tha'rt a Quaker wi' meat. Now, marm bark ! Try jelly on th' cake, it's non so rich—aw do wish i' my heart aw know'd tha were comin' ! It's on'y black-currant jelly, mother ; it wonna trouble thy teeth like th' fruit itsen ; that's what aw thought on. More tea ? "

Mrs. Lloyd nodded modestly, saying under her breath :

" Ië—thank you " (Yes—thank you.)

" Well done ; that's right. Aw know'd aw made it temptin' good for thee, an' it's allus refreshin' after a travel. Ours may not be as good cream as thy Welsh, but it's better nor the blue wash they sells here for what they call milk. Theer's thy cup, marm bark—what are tha

smilin' at, Britton boy? My Welsh, aw s'pose? Ah, well, aw'm Welsh i' my heart if not in my tongue, and that's all I want thy mother here to feel—hey, mother? Put out thy hand again, mother, when tha'rt ready. Rachel, give Sam some more bread—he's lookin'; and if he clemmed he wouldn' ask i' comp'ny. That's right, Liz and Jimmy, keep thee good gen th' wall; thee and Sally will have a tea-party to thysens soon. Lors! Get another big cup down, Rachel; yons thy fayther comin'. Aw fair fancied it wor our Sodger Dick's foot, spurs an' all; but 'twas a tinkle o' som'boddy's spoon as set me ear a-thinkin'. But it *is* fayther aw hear. Aw wish it wor our Dick as well! *He'd* show thee what cakes an' mouths are for, Mrs. Lloyd. Mak' room at the corner, Britton, betwix' thee and Dan. It's my man, Mrs. Lloyd."

"Hullo!" said Ned, entering. "There's flood and overflow everywheer, then? Even up on th' bed! Is it a birthday or a waddin', or a Chris'nin'? or is it the finish of a funer-ral?"

"Tha mun well ask all that," said Nance. "Come thee here, Ned, and see what tha's often 'eard of."

"Why, art ta goin' ta show me thy tattlin' tongue, woman?" he playfully asked, smiling at Mrs. Lloyd in advance of his introduction. "It's Britton's mother aw see; welcome, missis!—how art ta?"—and he shook her hand in both of his—"how *art* ta? Welcome, missis! Welcome! And aw've no doubt by the sight o' thy face they've all on 'em had a kiss at thee, and *aw'll* hev one, too!"—and he set the company at the table, on the bed, and the fire-stool in screaming roars and titters by bending over and embracing Britton's mother. He was twice as good as his word, for the first big kiss on her right cheek was evidently so good that he took a bigger from the left, saying, as he went to his cup at the corner: "Aw forget whether thy good man's living or not, Mrs. Britton; but if he is, and my Nance theer ever goes to foreign parts i' Wales, he can do the same kindness to her."

"Ay, an' welcome," said Nance. "An now, fayther—cake?"

"Oh, ay; aw'll be as good as comp'ny. My sakes! aw wish tha would come oftener, Mrs. Britton, it would improve our vittals; it's not often we have two Sundays in a

week, and aw'm right well sure an' certain there's far more dark eyes lookin' out at me from this here curran' cake nor usual—thanks to the comin' o' somebody from Wales."

"Now, that's wheer tha'rt mistak'n, Ned; that's wheer people as are *too* clever are nipped; it's the same cake as tha had o' Sunday—isn't it, Rache?"

"Then more shame for thee," answered Ned, in good humour, "to give stale cakes to comp'ny—hey, Mrs. Mother of Britton?"

Mrs. Lloyd looked dazed.

Nance, because of that, looked severely at Ned and sympathetically at Mrs. Lloyd, and just as Britton and Rachel, with the glow of the tea upon them, were exchanging something of the glow of love through a steady gaze, Ned said loudly:

"Well, Britton, tha's had enough wayter, aw s'pose, to serve thee without drinkin' for a lifetime? . . . And wayter's rising again."

Britton turned pale.

"Get thy tea, fayther—get thy tea," said Nance, "and talk 'work' again; tha'll frighten Britton's mother."

"Well, she needn' be frighten for two or three weeks yet to come, for there'll be no coal-getting in No. 1 till then—props are down, roads are up, and here's wayter agen."

"Hey, but, Ned, man, tha'rt like to a terrier for stickin' to thy bark. Get thy tea; the childer are watchin' ev'ry bit—we put away now. Come, Mrs. Lloyd, more jelly?—it's toothsome to finish with."

Mrs. Lloyd shook her head.

"More cakè?—more tea?"

She shook her head again.

"A little—to finish? Na, *do!*"

She put her hands together and moved them up and down as she shook her head more firmly, saying: "Thank you, thank you, Mrs. Ockleshaw; I have had my best tea in the world!"

There was a knock.

Sam called: "Door!"

Nance said, "It'll be for me," and rose, going to the door. "Ay; Mrs. Thornton wants me now, does she?" remarked Nance to the girl at the door. "Tell her awm

comin' now. Rachel, lass, I must leave thee to see to childer's tea and to clear up. Mrs. Thornton wants me for their fayther and mother, poor innocents, and that bab's asleep yet, Sam. Bless him! 'twill be years afore *he* knows what's happenin' to-day in the house he wor born in on'y three months ago. Don't mind me leavin' you for 'n'our or two, Mrs. Lloyd; aw'll explain again. Mak' thysen easy about to-night. Tell her, Britton, lad, that aw've arranged; she can sleep wi' Rachel."

"But the childer?" said Rachel.

"Sam can do wi' two at foot of the bed theer; Sally can go next door to Mrs. Booth's; and aw'll tak' babs."

"I was goin' to have the babs," said Rachel.

"Ay, ay; but not with Britton's mother. No, no; the owd dame must *sleep*," said Nance, pinning a scarlet head-shawl under her chin. "Oh, we'll manage. Britton, give thy mother a tune."

"Ay," called Sam, "a tune."

"Indeed," said Nance, going, "give the Almighty a tune for thy deliverance, if for nowt else, and think on the collier's home me and Mrs. Thornton's goin' to this minute. Aw'll be back in a hour or so, Mrs. Lloyd; and Nance went to again give a helping hand in the dark, silent, haunted little cottage with the white blinds down, where the young husband and wife lay dead; where the remnants of food in the cupboard seemed like cancelled things; where the low fire burned unheeded, and the waning cinders fell muffled on the ashes, and went out as if in imitation of death; and where the chained white terrier in the yard howled for the master who would not come, for its mistress who would not come, for the children who would not come, and howled there until pitying Nance opened the back-yard door, cast some food on the ground outside, slipped the collar off the dog's neck, and shut him out to give him his selection of freedom, to "get him away from worritin' over someut he couldn't understand. It's hard enough for people-folk to understand, to say nowt o' dogs," muttered Nance, as she returned to the kitchen, where the corpse of young Gummidge was on the dresser.

"Don't tha think," said stout Mrs. Thornton, in a low, husky, half-complaining tone, "that we might have a bit

more comp'ny? It feels queer to have th' dead in equal numbers wi' th' livin'."

"Please thysen," answered Nance—"please thysen; but as for mysen, *aw* keep sayin' th' Lord's Prayer. At tryin' times that's as good as a chapel o' people to me. But please thysen afore we begin."

"Aw'd have more heart," said Mrs. Thornton very sincerely.

"Then go o'er to Mrs. Boothroyd; she's nerves like the nails in a clog."

"Aw do really think aw will," answered Mrs. Thornton. "Aw never had to do wi' a man corpse afore, an' aw s'pose we'll be dressin' it first. When will coffins come?"

"Not till to-morrow," answered Nance, suspecting Mrs. Thornton's wish to put off the task; "but we mun do this work *now*. If thar't skeered, go for Mrs. Boothroyd. Tha mun keep up; it'll soon be o'er; but it mun be *done*. God help us! it's on'y what we'll want oursels some day; think o' that, and brace up. Think o' the *pity* side; that's how aw do, and not on the frettin' an' the frightenin'. Should we manage aw two sel's, Mrs. Thornton?"

"Aw'd much rayther a third," replied Mrs. Thornton, opening the front-door. "Aw'll just go o'er and ask Mrs. Boothroyd in. Aw'll not shut door on thee."

"Hey, Mrs. Thornton, Mrs. Thornton, but tha'rt a poor one! Tha thinks on the side aw *never* think on of my own accord. Aw think of the *love* of it, and picture me and my own Ned dead in our own house, an' neighbours comin' in to do their best to the last. Off wi' thee! Ask Mrs. Boothroyd o'er"; and Mrs. Thornton went, Nance looking after her, muttering, "Ay, ay; a good job, Mrs. Thornton, when thy turn comes, tha wanna have thysen to depend on. The poor dead are hard enough to deal wi'; but aw think some o' the livin' wi'out the true feelin' like one God's creature to another are a dead sight worse. . . . Hey, Bob, Bob! Bob Gummidge!" Nance continued, as she turned to the covered form on the dresser—"brave Bob Gummidge! bonny Bob Gummidge! aw could shake thee by thy cold hand and still feel warm to thee and thine. Bless thee, lad—*God* bless thee! *We'll* see to thy bairns somehow. Aw'll be mother to the babs mysen, lad. . . . It'll be an undertakin'—but what right road on this earth

is'n an undertakin' ? Ay, indeed, what ? Well, Mrs. Boothroyd, Mrs. Thornton here *would* have thee, and th' three on us puts me i' mind of a cuttin' o' marble figures aw saw in exhibition year and years back, called Faith, and Hope, and Charity."

"And who's Faith, and who's Hope ?" asked Mrs. Boothroyd. "I know who's Charity ; her name's Nance."

"Come, come," protested Nance cheerily, to give drooping Mrs. Thornton heart. "Tha munna cut me off into one piece like that. No, no, no. *Tha* can pick and choose for thysens, but as for *myself*, aw feel that aw've a bit o' someout of all three."

Mrs. Boothroyd laughed, but checked herself, remembering the dead.

"It's true," answered Nance, glancing at the covered form and lowering her voice. "Aw've *faith* in God ; aw've *hope* in His heaven ; and aw *think* that aw've *charity* to both His livin' and His dead."

"Tha *has*, Nance, love. . . . Well"—and there was a great sigh from Mrs. Boothroyd, and her generous, motherly eyes filled with tears—"well, in that spirit let us begin."

And Faith, Hope, and Charity began their sacred task.

* * * * *

On the following morning the Conservative newspaper placards throughout the kingdom announced :

LORD SALISBURY

ON

FOREIGN AFFAIRS.

THE BISHOP OF RIPON ON THE CHURCH :

INTERESTING ADDRESS.

THE DOWLEY DIVORCE CASE.

GREAT STORM IN AMERICA.

THE FLOODING OF A COLLIERY.

SPORTING.

The Liberal newspaper placards ran :

LORD SALISBURY AT LIVERPOOL.

THE SCANDAL IN HIGH LIFE :

REMARKABLE REVELATIONS.

THE BISHOP OF RIPON ON CONSCIENCE.

STRANGE SUICIDE OF A STOCKBROKER.

IS CHRISTIANITY PLAYED OUT ?

IMPORTANT CORRESPONDENCE.

THE COLLIERY DISASTER :

A DISTRESSING CASE.

BOOK REVIEWS AND DRAMATIC NOTES.

The Conservative papers gave two columns of Lord Salisbury, and a leader ; three-quarters of a column of the Bishop of Ripon, and a leaderette ; while the Liberal papers gave from one to two columns of Lord Salisbury, and a leader ; and a quarter of a column of the Lord Bishop of Ripon, without the leaderette—and the world wagged on towards another dinner-time.

In both Conservative and Liberal papers the following paragraph appeared in a remote corner, as if it had been almost forgotten, and remembered only at the very last moment :

“THE COLLIERY DISASTER.—Yesterday afternoon a sad event occurred in connection with the flooding of No. 1 Pit at Beckerton-beyond-Brow. When the body of one of the five colliers who were drowned was conveyed home his wife was so overcome that she fainted. A doctor was sent for, but life was found to be extinct. She leaves four children. An inquest will be held.”

The inquest was held ; there was a verdict of “Natural causes,” and the busy world went on untouched, unmoved, indifferent to the permanent domestic tragedy living on day after day in Beckerton-beyond-Brow, in the Gunmidge children themselves, as a sequel to the flooding of No. 1.

In Beckerton Old Hall Mr. Harry Brookster cut out of that day's paper “Lord Salisbury on Foreign Affairs,” and pasted it into a new scrap-book for political nutrition ; and at the Vicarage of All Souls' Mr. Waide marked his

admiration of the Bishop of Ripon's address on the Church by impaling it on the study wall with a pin.

Grace, on the other hand, went to the Gummidge children, helped and consoled them, and mingled some of the tragedy of her inner life with the tragedy of theirs.



CHAPTER XI

BUSINESS—AND PLEASURE

Two nights after the beginning of the permanent tragedy in the cottage home of the Gummidges, there was, by an arrangement more than a week earlier, a dinner-party at Beckerton Old Hall.

It was quite an unusual dinner-party both in character and kind for the Brooksters, it being "chiefly a gentleman's affair—a business gentleman's affair," to quote the words, only of Mrs. Brookster. To quote her superior, confidential, and apologetic tone and manner of saying them to Miss Flemming would require one of the comedy actresses of the good old school. She gave Miss Flemming the impression that it was one of Mr. Brookster's stoops to conquer. He had often entertained business gentlemen to dinner in London, at clubs, at hotels, and the like, she presumed, but—ah!—well—this was the first time it had occurred in such a marked manner at home, and she didn't like it.

The only ladies present were the ladies of the house—Mrs. Brookster, her two daughters, Bertha and Dora, and the visitor, Miss Flemming. In Mr. Brookster's opinion, they were very valuable social ingredients. They gave that unusual gathering of commercial spirits in Beckerton Old Hall a homely, amiable air of sincerity and truth.

Mr. Waide, the Vicar, was there. In the secret recesses of Mr. Brookster's mind, Mr. Waide was classed with the ladies, and yet above the ladies. He, too, was there as a social ingredient, but especially valuable for dinner-table qualities of mirth, freedom, and anecdote, which none of the Brooksters possessed; for, as a rule, the Brooksters were rather austere, sombre, moody; at times even clouded, as if conscience were shadowed by upward wandering

phantoms of collier women of prior generations ; and of men, and even ponies, of current generations, from the subterranean regions of the truly black forests of coal.

The remarkable fact was that Mr. Waide was there without the faintest trace in word, manner, or appearance—excepting under the eyes a little—of having recently passed through a moral conflict, and very narrowly escaped a spiritual revolution. Nevertheless, there were some faint lingering after-effects within him, and it was his intention, if he got an opportunity, to ask Mr. Brookster if he would buy up the Rasselton Mill shares from him—his hands would be freer without them.

Mr. Waide was just a little nervous about this, but otherwise he was in excellent form. He entertained girlish Miss Dora Brookster on his left in the most playfully boyish style ; he spoke Toryised Liberalism to Mr. Harry on his right ; he supported Mr. Brookster in his very emphatic views of impending bad trade if something wasn't done at headquarters with foreign competition ; he told a collier-and-dog story that was quite new to the entire company, and with such success against the collier that Mr. Brookster, with extra geniality, reminded footman Hess that Mr. Waide was again without claret.

The dinner, as a dinner, was a marked success, and the Brooksters as a family once more attributed that result to Mr. Waide ; and with justice, too, for he was certainly the brightest spirit there.

When the ladies left for the drawing-room, and Hess had closed the dining-room door upon the eight gentlemen, the sensation was as if smiles and frowns had been suddenly and inartistically separated, the frowns being left behind with the men.

Mr. Brookster's cigars were passed, and behind the flare of the matches and the first puffs of smoke, each man, with the exception of Mr. Brookster, Mr. Harry, and the Vicar, seemed to brood, and to brood on the defensive.

Even Mr. Waide, at last yielding to Mr. Brookster, lit his cigar with a furrowed, contemplative look, as if the idea were dawning upon him that the new Town Clerk of Gaberton, the young gas-manager at Hardborough, the head of a department in a railway company, the proprietor

of a steel forge, and one of the partners in a shipping concern, were gathered there for a purpose.

In fact, the instinct of natural selection acted upon Mr. Waide; he put down his cigar, caught Mr. Brookster's ready eye, and frankly said that he would join the ladies—meaning that he would not block the way.

Mr. Brookster then caught Mr. Waide's eye, and with such domineering social effect that Mr. Waide took up his fainting cigar and puffed it into life again, while the other men, with a word here and there, and forced efforts to resume the spirit of the dinner-table, felt their beards, twisted their moustaches, and glanced at Mr. Brookster as if he were a dentist handling the forceps instead of a cigar.

The New Town Clerk of Gaberton and the young gas-manager of Hardborough already wished that they were at home. What, prior to that visit, they were sure could never happen, was happening in a peculiarly quiet, silent, intangible way. If, they mused, coal contracts with Messrs. Brookster, Son, and Co. did follow this, and the people of Gaberton and Hardborough heard that they were at Mr. Brookster's house to dinner, the public would put two and two together, and, instead of making four of it, make five, and raise the cry of jobbery, commission, private interest, etc., etc.

Yes, those two guests at least—those two novices in the superfine art of business by dining—sincerely wished that they were absolutely on the safe side of liberty by being at home in the innocent region of their sleeping families; for Mr. Brookster's now restless, reddish-brown, glassy eyes dancing in their own brilliance had the appearance of a mesmerist's living discs, which could at least try to set the conscience to sleep, while his brilliantly-ringed fingers looked as if they could, through thought itself, touch the organ of acquisitiveness in another to a pitch of greed.

As yet those two were innocent, and in the presence of something like guilt they were almost afraid. They regarded even the shining decanters as mesmeric discs, and kept their own wills on the strain as against Mr. Brookster's; and as against the collective will of Beckerton Old Hall, too, for the old-world quaintness and the new-world

luxury of the elaborate and beautiful place verily seemed to have a will of their own to make unfortunate beings not in possession long by hook or by crook to possess.

The other three gentlemen were more seasoned men of the world, and could take Mr. Brookster's dinner, take his wine, take his cigars, and then take their leave without committing either their pockets or their souls excepting in the hard-and-fast—very hard and very fast—way of business; and this, interpreted, meant coal by the one and two hundred thousand tons cheaper from the Brookster collieries than it could be got anywhere else. *They* had directors' fees, company's profits, and shareholder's dividends to consider; *they* bought in the very cheapest market, dinners notwithstanding; *they* did not care where the coal came from, how it came, how it was got, or who got it, so long as it was delivered sixpence, a shilling, or eighteenpence a ton cheaper than the last. The last did not "pay" because their concerns only made £15,000 profit instead of £20,000. A drop in coal would result in another big year.

Now, that was precisely the unexpressed argument in Mr. Brookster's mind. Had business diplomacy permitted him to be candid, he might have had printed on the back of his *menu-cards* the words:

COAL CONTRACTS SOUGHT.

RAILWAY, SHIPPING, AND CORPORATIONS SUPPLIED
AT LOWEST POSSIBLE RATES.

Special Terms for Big Lines.

TENDERS SUBMITTED.

For further Particulars, apply after Dinner.

N.B.—COMMISSION.

But Mr. Brookster, of course, knew the world too well to do that. He knew that the trout is not half so confused, agitated, and insulted when caught by an imitation fly as when caught by a frank dart of the hand with a ruthless squeeze of the neck. He knew that competition among his fellow colliery proprietors was so sharp and keen that business had to be "worked," "arranged," "brought about"; and he, like others, had latterly found that the social plan was one of the most easy and illusive.

"I must confess," said Mr. Brookster after some general talk, and while the decanters were being passed, "I don't know what England" (whenever he used the word "England" in this sense he always referred to everybody else in the census but himself), "I don't know what England means—it's being undersold—look abroad—raw material cheaper, labour cheaper——"

'Yes, but look at our quality," said Bramham, the maker of steel.

"You're right," confirmed Harker, the shipping man.

"Hang quality—it's the *quantity*, the output, I look at," said Brookster.

"Yes, there's something in that," said the shipper. "Give *us* quantity. We've got the ships, we've got the men, but we *want* the money too. Freights and passengers *we* want, in any quantity you like."

"Well, we have both quantity and quality; nobody can beat us," said Bramham.

"In your line," suggested Mr. Brookster.

"In *any* line!" answered Bramham.

"At present, at present!" said Mr. Brookster, warming. "Wait a bit. We're losing ground. Our cost of production is too heavy—look at wages now and wages as they used to be! Pooh! That's the point—that's the pinch. We are fighting the rest of the world on a higher wage and a shorter day. It can't be done, sir—it can't be done! I said it fifteen years ago, and I say it now."

"We can't go back," said Bramham.

"Why not?" asked Mr. Brookster, as if he would go back beyond creation itself if it did not pay. "Why not?"

"Impossible."

"How? Why? I don't see it! The country is a shop—a business; it doesn't pay, what's to be done? Cut down 'ex's,' of course—cut down 'ex's.' I said it would come as surely as day and death; and it has—it has. We've been going too fast with Radical ideas—secular education—votes—shorter hours—higher wage—State interference—ay, and the interference of talking women and coddling sentimentalists!"

Mr. Waide was visited by a vision of Grace. He changed his cigar from one hand to the other, and tried to look

at the ornamental ceiling in chocolate and gold as if he hadn't heard anything.

Mr. Brookster, however, like a deft waltzer proud of his power to reverse, repeated :

“Coddling sentimentalists and talking women ! There's too much talk, too much ranting by mere lads. Why, in my earlier days their grandfathers—a *splendid* set of fellows !—would have ducked *their* sons if they talked in the way sons talk now. I tell you it won't last. We've made jumps in the dark, and we'll have to step back.”

“No, no, Mr. Brookster,” said the steelmaker playfully ; “give us cheaper coal, and *we'll* keep the old shop going.”

“There you are !” replied Mr. Brookster. “You've hit it : cost of production—labour. Look at the old days. Compare the wage then and the wage now. *Now* your collier must have a parlour and a piano—and he's tinkling the trade out of the country. Labour ought to be cheaper—cheaper all round ; we're being undersold—we can't compete. What is the commonsense of it ? Cut down expenses—cut them down !” and Mr. Brookster lifted a glass of port, not for the flicker of a moment reflecting that one of the expenses of trade which might be cut down a little was the extremely expensive labour of over-grasping proprietors and masters, who had no sense of the moral and material proportion of things.

Nor did this occur to the steelmaker, the shipper, or the railway official, excepting in an envious personal way, for they compared their day's work with Mr. Brookster's, their cash results with his, even their house with his—hence they vaguely concluded that the colliery proprietor had a very unreasonable cash and labour advantage over them all ; and on that account they, with a sort of revengeful relish, that night somewhat freely reduced his wine and cigars.

Mr. Waide had become very uneasy. He ceased to smoke.

Mr. Harry sat silent, smoking scented cigarettes—sipping—yawning—lifting his left heel on his right knee, then his right heel on his left knee—now and then flashing open his gold hunter watch and wishing he were again in town instead of there, listening by force to questions of trade, which he was secretly resolved when *his* time

came would never bother him: *he* would wisp the dust of coal off his patent leather shoes—and be quiet. Even Parliament was rowdy.

“It will have to come—we *must* cut down,” resumed Mr. Brookster, biting off the end of a fresh cigar, as if that were an illustration of how he would cut down.

“Look at stocks—I mean in my own line—increasing every day.” (He pressed that fact to show how he was in a sort of forced position to do business almost on any terms.) “Increasing every day, I tell you. Why increasing? Shipping bad—railway traffic low. Why? Bad trade. Why? We can’t compete. Production too costly. *You* know. Begin at the beginning. Gad, there’ll have to be a change! Why, gentlemen, we’re being led by the nose by the agitator—no, pulled and dragged by the nose! We have one or two of them in this district, and, bless your souls, *I—I* give them their living—I pay them their wages—and yet on my own ground, and in my own pits, they go talking their rot about masters and men. Why, only for me, they’d have nothing to do; they’d starve. I needn’t get the coal unless I like,” he said, as if he were getting it solely to oblige the men. “Pooh! Starve? *They’ll* starve some day, if they talk as they do!”

Mr. Waide was nervous with inner agitation. He tried to repress his thoughts of Grace, but could not. He felt as if he were in his study again, but without the relief of being alone. A thumping palpitation distressed him. He was slightly dizzy. He wanted to rise, yet was fighting with a nervous indecision. He was unaware of his act of rising, and only aware of himself standing and of hearing himself saying rather to the others than to Mr. Brookster:

“Excuse me, gentlemen; I’ll join the ladies.”

Mr. Brookster was too warm upon his topic to oppose; but when the Vicar had his hand upon the door-knob, Mr. Brookster called:

“By the way, that reminds me—I’ll see you after, Mr. Waide. I’ve something for you. Those flooded people will get something from the fund, you know; but I thought I would give the widows of the three men and the mothers of the two youths a five-pound note each out of my own purse; but I’ll see you after.”

Mr. Waide felt as if he had heard through cotton wool ; nevertheless, he did hear it, and always ready with gratitude for that kind of generous Christian deed, he thanked Mr. Brookster. He was sure the money would be very acceptable ; he would take it with pleasure.

He closed the door and crossed the hall. His thoughts were easier for that generous act on the part of wealth. He had a good point to record. Grace would be pleased, surprised, mollified, and after a pause, which he devoted to free breathing and his toilet, he entered the drawing-room like a courier from the gusty North, personally glad of bearing good news to the sunny South.

The four ladies by the broad open fireplace welcomed him very pleasantly. Dora and Bertha, who were sitting in front, flanked to the right and left to enable him to do what he invariably did under those conditions, and he stepped upon the hearthrug, wheeled right about face, stood with his hands behind him to the fire, and beamed down to them while they smiled up at him, and chatted and worked with silken threads. Mrs. Brookster and little Miss Dora were on his left, while Miss Brookster (Bertha) and Miss Flemming were on his right.

Mr. Waide was so very pleased with the last words of Mr. Brookster that he broke his own instinctive rule of not referring to any department of the coal business when with the ladies. He at once told them what Mr. Brookster was so kindly going to do.

Dora was the only one who received the news with an upward gaze of appreciation. The others received it with eyes down upon their sewing, as if Mr. Waide had only incidentally remarked that silk thread was very dear in South Africa, the news not being worth the risk of making a false stitch.

“How is Grace ?” asked Dora timorously, now looking down at her work ; and with forced courage the faces of the other three turned upward awaiting his reply.

“Oh, *fairly* well—only fairly. . . . Poor child ! . . . I am sorry for her. . . . It has been a great strain, Mrs. Brookster.

Mrs. Brookster’s resisting poise of her head as she resumed work, and the increased force of her silver thimble upon the head of her needle, resulting in quite a snappy click,

almost audibly said, "Well, she deserves to suffer—a little."

"And poor Harry also looks—down," added Mr. Waide, with a sympathetic feeling for the Brooksters, which he desired to be reciprocated towards himself in regard to Grace. "I understood that he was going away?"

"To-morrow," said Mrs. Brookster.

"Oh, it may come all right yet," boldly said Mr. Waide, while thus in unexpected communion with the directing hearts of the Brookster family in the affairs of love. "I have hopes. There is one good thing—they were young together."

There was no response. Mrs. Brookster asked Dora for the skein of scarlet silk; Dora, while passing it, glanced her brown eyes feelingly at Mr. Waide. He looked isolated, moody, puzzled. She came to his rescue by saying:

"We are going for a drive to-morrow afternoon, Mr. Waide. Ask Grace to be ready; we will call for her. Bertha and I are going to take Florrie" (Miss Flemming) "around Moorside, through Berkshaw, and home by Ardlewick."

"A delightful round!" said Mr. Waide. "Thank you, Dora. I'll tell Grace; she will be delighted, I'm sure. I wish, indeed, she could see a little more of you girls than usual just now. It would help her."

"Grace—works—too—hard," slowly remarked tall Bertha, lowering her own silken work into her lap, and leaning back in her low easy-chair for a lethargic spell of lounging rest.

"She does," affirmed Mr. Waide. "That is, she allows it to tell too much. She should hold it off her more; she shouldn't allow individual cases to impress her so. Ay, Grace is much too sensitive for parish work."

"And she does not confine herself to the congregation; I hear," said Bertha, completing her lounge by straightening her long limbs and crossing her ankles, so that the tips of her new bronze dress-shoes peeped up at Mr. Waide like a couple of finches. "She goes among all sorts. She does more than Mr. Rew."

Dora's head bent, her lips tightened, and the act seemed to squeeze some of the deeper colour out of her lips up into her cheeks. She wanted to playfully protest, but her

scissors fell, and she put all her feeling into the rather elaborate act of picking them up.

"All sorts!" added Bertha, picturing yards, courts, and alleys.

"It is a—mistake," said Mrs. Brookster, with marked authority.

"I am not so sure of that, Mrs. Brookster," replied Mr. Waide very gently. "The south gallery is filling. One or two who never went anywhere come there. No, the mistake is that Grace thinks too much of it. Work, but quiet, steady, calm, undisturbing work, is the thing. That is why I should like her to see more of the girls, especially just now. It will take up her thoughts. You will call then, Dora?"

"With pleasure," answered Dora. "Tell her there will only be the four of us, Mr. Waide, and you see that she has no excuse."

Mr. Waide now had two pleasant Brookster items for Grace, and he wanted to take them home. He shortly begged to be excused, the small brougham was ordered, and with five £5 notes in his pocket, and the Rasselton Mill shares still unsold—not so much as mentioned—he was driven home in a moody state of compromise.

But only until a better opportunity presented itself. After all, he could only act according to circumstances; after all, too, Mr. Brookster was exceedingly good, and it was better to reconcile than to offend.

CHAPTER XII

PLEASURE—AND BUSINESS

THE following day was exceptionally fine. The afternoon spring sunshine darted with exultant beams across an elevated plane of moorland, tipping in its silent travels the gold of the early gorse, the silver bark of the dwarfed beech, the bronze of the faded bracken, and far, far away, revealing the colour secrets of the uplands by penetrating the veil of purple to the hidden bowers of brown and green.

The beams quivered and danced, and the whole blue sky looked on without a cloud.

Now and then the rays quivered upon two superb chestnut horses with silver mountings, two coachmen in brown livery, an open carriage of the rich brown tones of the stalks of heather, and four young ladies like daintily-feathered fledglings cosy in a nest.

Bertha and Miss Flemming were in the best seats, with their faces to the horses, and Dora and Grace were opposite; Grace, compared with the freshness both of colour and manner of the other three, looking rather like an over-worked hospital nurse. Even the all-beautifying sun could not do itself as much justice upon her as upon the others; her very hair, full and fluffy and marigolden though it was, appeared as if some of the life had been fagged out of it by the stress of thoughts beneath; and her rather sunken blue eyes seemed to cloister themselves in the dark shade surrounding them and to decline being comforted.

In a few moments, at a glorious point for the focussing of the longest and broadest range of the moor, with the beams intensifying the tones here, the shadows there, and the beauty everywhere, the shade under Grace's eyes deepened, the outlines of the thin face became keener under pain, while the eyes turned sorrowfully away from the scene and gazed fixedly at a carriage button—otherwise the faintest movement of the eye, nay, the faintest movement of the emotion would have brought tears. "Ah, Nature, outside of the human nature that she had chiefly known, was so bountiful, so unexclusive, so free and open," she mused. "It was there for everybody; there for the true seeking; and yet there in a sort of loneliness, for so very few sought. . . . Surely, surely, something was wrong? Surely, surely, man had lost his road? The life of Nature was so large and beautiful; the life of men—some men—so narrow, ugly and mean. What had come between man and Nature—nay, between man and the true God? Still the old, old worship of the old, old Golden Calf? Ay, what *had* come between? For wherever she went, wherever she looked, the divine indicator seemed to point out that as things are, they are wrong. Yes, this drive around the moor and through the sunshine was one more confirmation. Oh, why did not her own father come out there and think as she thought

and feel as she felt? Instead of grinding his sermons out of books in the study in pain, as she knew he did, why did he not come out there and *feel* his sermons with a broadening thrill of that joy which is related to the spiritual *and* material welfare, not of a class, but of all? For to truly know Nature was like truly knowing Christ, both having the spirit of the one divine law.

“And was it right that people should be kept in ignorance?—one generation sealing up the darkness in another. Was it right to keep back the light? Perhaps, if proud Bertha Brookster, if sweet, sympathetic, innocent Dora Brookster, if worldly Miss Flemming, really *knew* the whole of Truth and not a part of it, they would rejoice to *live* it? Perhaps even Mr. and Mrs. Brookster and *Harry* would? ‘If they would, what a change on the face of things in Beckerton-beyond-Brow! If her own dear father thoroughly knew it, what revelations of sermons he could preach! *God give him light,*” her spirit prayed, and the sun suddenly shone upon her, even, as she herself mystically thought, with something of the comforting warmth of the Holy Ghost.

Then some dim memory of a dim idea came and haunted her. It was like the memory of a memory—the thought of a thought—and it hovered for full comprehension over her seeking consciousness; it did so even while Dora spoke of her, even while Bertha and Miss Flemming said pleasant things; but more than ever did it hover when her gaze again wandered to the luring gradations from the vivid brown foreground of flowerless heather to the purple ridges of moorlands beyond, from these to the regions of rippling gray that merged with the horizon mists, and from these away up into the blue sky, which bloomed like an ideal of the intensest heather flower above it all.

The haunting idea was her early false ideal of her father, of the Church, and of society—before she had thought out the logic of the Gospel for herself. She had thought enough. *She* ought to be logical now, and act. Even her presence in that carriage came upon her as an association, at least, with wrong and shame.

Suddenly Bertha, Dora, and their friend Miss Flemming, heard the hoofs of a horse clanging clearer and

clearer; and they held their eyes—almost their smiles—in readiness.

They knew the trot. It was their friend Mr. Dawbairn, of Hockley Lodge.

He knew the Brooksters' chestnut pair, of course, and as he trotted into range of Bertha and Miss Flemming, he doffed his hat as a general passing greeting; but while he passed his eyes sought someone in particular, and he enjoyed a rather marked satisfaction in discovering that Dora was really there. Indeed, while vanishing and glancing back he performed a supplementary salute that was entirely dedicated to her.

Dora's acknowledgment, however, was something like the compulsory bow of a daisy to a passing breeze, and she did not enter into even the demure, decorous delight which Bertha and Miss Flemming indulged in simply because Mr. Alfred Dawbairn, of Hockley Lodge, had been trottingly in their presence for the period of five seconds and the space of three yards.

On they drove. Dora remarked that at the heath-road track she and Grace would walk across the angle of the moor there, and meet the carriage at Berkshaw.

At the heath-road track Dora and Grace left the carriage and entered the moor. They were a strongly contrasted pair, and yet they had that kinship which exists between a long acorn and a short one.

Dora was nervous and anxious. She had a question to put.

When they had walked well into the dry, boggy silence of the narrowing track, where they had to move in single file, Dora being first, she, with ardent frankness, called, without looking behind.

"Grace, dear, I do wish you would tell me something I want to know. Will you, if I ask? Don't think that I am asking for anybody else; don't think that I intended to ask when I suggested the drive; I didn't think of it, then, and I only want to help, if I can."

"Ask, and I'll tell you," replied Grace, thinking that sympathetic little Dora had read her thoughts during the drive, and that this was one of the ordained occasions for the Truth to be told.

"Well, now, don't be hurt; I'm not spying. Are you *sorry* about Harry?"

Grace was surprised, disappointed, hurt; but only because one human being was so very far from another, even in the closest contact. She did not reply, but allowed Dora to continue, in the hope that she would grope her way nearer to the truth.

“Do you regret it?” said Dora, stopping to gather a tuft of wild thyme. “And would you like me to *help* you?” she asked while stooping.

Grace looked far away to the uplands. That was good of dear Dora. Grace knelt on one knee by her. Dora’s sweet pure face was still bent towards the thyme, but Grace drew it to hers, and the two gratitudes met in a kiss.

“Thank you, dear Dora; but you have not quite guessed.”

Dora uttered a deeply regretful, “Oh, Grace? . . . I was sure that I had! And you *don’t* regret?”

Grace rose.

“Then what *is* troubling you?” asked Dora, looking up, and putting her arm about Grace’s waist. It was like the dainty and limited embrace of a young ivy on a young but tall and slender silver beech.

Grace shook her head.

“Tell me, do!” appealed Dora. “Is it,” she asked, in her frankly guessing innocence—“is it, then, because *you* like . . . somebody else . . . and your father doesn’t? . . . Mr. Rew?” and she coloured.

“No, no, *no*,” cried Grace, in the agony of being misinterpreted again. She suddenly stood and turned her face away.

“Oh, Grace dear, don’t! Don’t! I’m sorry I have interfered. I thought I knew. Forgive me. And yet *do* tell me. Has your father lost money? Do those horrid pit people vex you? Are you going to leave us? Is there something wrong at the church or wrong at home, or wrong *anywhere*? Whatever it is, I’ll be so sorry for you. Grace dear, make me your real bosom friend. Please. I do feel so useless, not knowing; and I’d do anything to help you. Let us sit here; there is time; you sit on that nice bushy heather, and I’ll sit here, and we’ll have a good confidential talk all to ourselves; and if you will tell me, nobody, Grace dear, shall

know ; nobody ! And 'I'll tell you anything—anything you want to know about me, or anybody else. You know, Grace ; but what is troubling *you* ? ”

They both sat as if in the lowest and easiest of easy chairs. Grace, indeed, reclined with her hat off, and her marigolden head upon the heather, gazing up ; and Dora, leaning sideways towards her, awaiting the mystery, invitingly said : “ Now, then ! ”

“ Dora dear,” quietly responded Grace, “ do you feel here that though the land, air, sun, and sky do not belong to us, and cannot really belong to us, yet that they are ours ? ” (Dora screwed her girlish young brow into the resemblance of age, doing her best to be old and wise, trying hard to be appreciative and to comprehend.) “ Ours in trust ; ours to turn to good account for each and all ; ours to——”

“ I don't understand,” sincerely said Dora, also leaning back and looking up to the sky in the hope of seeing precisely as Grace's ardent blue eyes evidently saw.

“ You know the words, ‘ The earth is the Lord's, and all that therein is : the compass of the world, and they that dwell therein ’ ? ”

“ Yes, *I* remember them ! ” said Dora, delighted because something was familiar.

“ Well, that is my trouble, Dora child. No, no ; that is my consolation. The trouble is that it is not—believed.”

“ Oh, it *is* ! ” said Dora learnedly, and recklessly glad of something to grasp. Leaning up again, she added : “ Oh yes, Grace. You're mistaken *there*.”

Grace was too touched to be amused. “ Here,” she reflected, “ is the pathos of human innocence inheriting error. No wonder that it is written that we are born in sin. People are born in sin and think it virtue. A father lives by the sweat of other men's brows ; he amasses inordinate wealth ; his children are born to that wealth and deem it right. Nay, to them it is a providential instrument in their hands for more widely exercising the Christian virtue of charity. But charity, forsooth ! Charity to people who, had they but Christian justice first, would not require the really unchristian charity at the last.”

Grace's outer eye was looking at the sky ; her inner

eye was seeing the people in Brookster's Yard, Henshaw Row, Bank Street, Brow Road, and "they that dwell therein." Did they seem like the Lord's? No, no. Like some grinding man's. And yet here was dear, sympathetic little Dora, the daughter of the man who was rich by their poverty, being daily confirmed in the false doctrine that it was perfectly right. We are, indeed, *born* in sin, opined Grace, as her eyes suddenly became like derelicts, swamped in tears. She turned away from Dora's gaze, buried her face upon her hands in the heather, and wept a prayer that God's will, and not her will, might be done with innocent Dora, now on the threshold of practical life.

Innocent Dora buried her face in the heather as near Grace's as she could get. Full of repentant confession, she appealed:

"I didn't mean to speak like that. I didn't think that it would hurt you. Grace dear, listen—do listen. You know far more about those things than I do. We never speak about them at home—never; but, you see, *your* dear father is a Vicar, and he teaches you all this, and he—oh, dear, dear Grace, *don't* cry like that, or I'll be frightened! I'm sorry we left the carriage. And we are forgetting; it will be at Berkshaw."

Grace moved.

Dora made an affectionate rush at the first breach, and kissed Grace on the cheek, saying:

"You forgive me, don't you, darling?"

"Dora, dear girl, there is nothing to forgive," was the quiet answer, as Grace rose.

"That is just like you!" replied Dora, almost hanging on to Grace's waist with both arms as they went along the broadening track. "I would feel so much more comfortable if you would forgive me. I hurt you, I know."

"But not as you think you did."

"Then how?"

"We see things differently, dear girl; that—that is the pity."

"I should like to see them as you see them, so that I could know in what *way* I hurt you. But you do forgive me?"

Grace bent and hugged her, whereupon Dora cast her arms around Grace's neck, stood on tip-toes, and kissed

her priestess in a most grateful acceptance of the absolution. Then she said :

"Come, Grace, let us run—I'll race you! I don't want Bertha to see that we have been 'talking.' Now, one, two, three!" and off went Dora; but Grace had not just then the physical ardour to change her languid walk into a vigorous run.

The carriage was waiting at Berkshaw Cross, and they were all soon driving towards Moorside, a little manufacturing community, where the principal employer had lately adopted the bonus system, based upon the division of profits when they yielded more than a certain percentage. He had rebuilt the workmen's cottages upon both business and social principles, for his theory was—the better the whole condition of the man, the better the work; the better the work, the better the trade; the better the trade, the better the master and man; the better the master and man, the better the State; the better the State, the better the world.

As the carriage entered Moorside, with its rather new-looking cottages, rather young shrubs and creepers in the few feet of front-gardens, Bertha, with low-voiced cynicism, said to Miss Flemming :

"Behold the bonus art-curtains; and the mock Morris wall paper; and the pictures no less!"

Grace gazed sorrowfully at Bertha. Dora, at once rightly interpreting the look, boldly said, on behalf of Grace :

"For shame, Bertha. Why not?"

"They don't understand it, child."

"Not they," ratified Miss Flemming.

"And they never will, unless they learn," answered Dora. "They must begin some time. They couldn't bear the old-fashioned way now, I'm sure. Besides, it is only right. Why should they have ugly things and poor things, and be miserable?" and she looked at Grace.

There was a joyful acknowledgment in Grace's eyes, and to Dora and Grace the rest of the drive had something of an intellectual and moral delight.

CHAPTER XIII

TENDERS AND TENDENCIES

MR. HARRY BROOKSTER sometimes went a little in advance of his father to the head office of Messrs. Brookster, Son and Co., at Beckerton, which was two miles from the more rural Beckerton-beyond-Brow. Whenever Mr. Harry did this he was preparing the way for a few days in London, or the country, or the seaside. But whether early or late it was always under protest. He detested business.

He went to the office to open the letters, to distribute the orders, and to generally supervise, and he did so with a semi-military smartness which was an erratic contrast to his lethargic University style in London, in the country, or at the seaside, or even at home.

One morning he sent the blade of his dainty pen-knife through the top of a foolscap envelope and drew from the mouth of it a double sheet of luxuriously large and smooth white letter-paper. The letter-paper was topped by an elaborate heading and the engraving of a steamer that was sailing at full speed in an inch or two of ocean, and apparently going with unseamanlike recklessness into the ice-fields of the white paper.

The sight of the ship alone fully told Mr. Harry the purport of that welcome letter. His father, he knew, had been anxiously expecting it, and Mr. Harry felt a sort of extra satisfaction in actually reading :

“ GENTLEMEN,

“ We shall be glad to receive your tender for the annual contract for the supply of steaming coal in accordance with the enclosed specification.

“ Yours faithfully, etc.”

Mr. Harry vigorously trimmed one side of his moustache into something of the shape of the waved line of smoke which the funnels of the engraved steamer were leaving upon space, put the specification and letter aside for his father, and opened the next letter.

“ Hullo ! Another ? ”

Yes, another; and from one of the biggest railway concerns in the kingdom this time.

For a rare moment or two he felt as eager as his father. He rang the desk bell for the chief clerk.

"Look up last year's tenders for steam—ship and rail."

The clerk retired, and Mr. Harry's fingers tugged the other side of his moustache into a vivid symbol of the smoke of a locomotive soon after coaling.

Mr. Brookster thereupon entered like a gust. "Anything fresh?"

"Ship and rail."

"Good. Which? How many?"

"Only two, so far. Here they are."

"No gas?"

"Not yet," answered Mr. Harry, still opening letters, but with a subdued air as if he had now thankfully transferred all the brisker elements of business to his father.

History almost repeated itself. Mr. Brookster rang his own desk bell even before he sat in his chair opposite Mr. Harry.

"Tenders," he abruptly said, before the clerk could fully enter.

The clerk darted backward into the general office again.

"There'll be a fight for it this time!" muttered Mr. Brookster, scanning the shipping specification. "Ay, a fight. This would take down our stock a bit—at a price—at a price."

Mr. Harry quietly announced:

"Here's the ten thousand ton order for 'household' from London."

"Ay, but that was safe, and the price is good. But it is this "steam" that will want getting."

The clerk entered with the letter-book. The private office door was closed, and Mr. Brookster was soon once more studying those tenders of last year, which were declined, in the hope that he could screw this year's tender into something irresistibly acceptable.

He was perfectly frank with himself. It was a case of cutting down. Others would cut; he would cut. He appeared resolute, even desperate. Nay, he looked greedy. As he sat considering, his very hand upon the desk was shaped as if to some inner desire to grab.

He did not know this. Had Mr. Harry said, "Don't look like that, Dad," he would have asked, "Like what?" and yet in a few minutes he would have been looking precisely as greedy and dogged again; for, though "Business is business" was a pet phrase of his, when it came to big contracts, business was a fight. Not that he liked business to be a fight. He much preferred the easier style of his early days; but when it became a fight his blood warmed to it, and if required he could strike all round. Fellow colliery proprietors themselves were not sacred from his business blows if it suited his purpose to deal them right and left and even a little below the business belt.

When Mr. Brookster saw by the letter-book, for the sixth time, how very finely they had cut down last year's tenders, and yet—confound it!—had lost the contracts, he rose with something of the strife of the whale obliged to come to the surface to blow, for with a pressure of air from between his lips like an immature whistle, he left his chair for the fireplace.

Harry looked up as if from a great distance for a moment.

"It's going to be tight," said his father, now almost as red as his scarlet tie.

"Think so?" asked Harry with a voice that was really in London.

"Sure—certain. A tug. But we'll try it. There's no trusting the others. They'll cut, we'll cut, and cut now, too. It's the only thing for it."

"But—eh—can we?" asked Harry, finishing a letter to a friend at the New Liberal Club.

"That's the point. We must have Carson in. We must go into it. We must manage it somehow. Carson can put the screw on all round."

Mr. Brookster resolutely rang his desk bell. He sent for Carson, the manager-in-chief of the Beckerton and Beckerton-beyond-Brow pits.

Now had there been a camera obscura in a balloon suspended in mid-air above the coalfields of the kingdom, capable of casting upon its white sheet the miniature black shades of proprietors, managers, and clerks in the rival colliery offices that morning, the little black figures would have looked like a swarm of silently busy flies working

in secret sets of three and four, each set working to defeat the rest of the swarm in some unmentionable conspiracy to gain its own ends.

For what had transpired at the office of Messrs. Brookster, Son and Co., also took place at other offices, north, south, east, and west.

Mr. Brookster was perfectly right in his surmise. The prevailing feeling in the colliery offices was to cut down—to cut down to the lowest—so low (morally) as to cut (commercially) somebody else's throat.

CHAPTER XIV

NED OCKLESHAW'S OPINION

A FORTNIGHT had passed since the flooding of No. 1 pit, and the mine was still unworkable. The falls were serious, the ways were blocked, and there were signs of more water.

The result was that almost half of the men in Becker-ton-beyond-Brow had their hands down the pits of their pockets, and were gloomily leaning against house-gables, shop shutter-boxes, or public-house window-frames, talking rather debilitated politics, and somewhat embittered social science, and cynically judging both Church and State. But this was not without prejudice—the prejudice of hunger, for most of the men were living upon two thin meals per day, and a very short allowance of tobacco per week.

Some of a younger generation sat on the heels of their tilted clogs and leaned against a wall, like a row of meditative frogs, and related the adventures and practical jokes in the days of their youth; while those of a still younger generation vigorously illustrated the frog in the leap over a line of six backs down a lane; or seemed to try to split themselves upwards at hop-skip-and-jump; or bounded like demons after a bewildered-looking football that was vainly trying to prove for the very last time the law of gravitation on a patch of earth as black as itself.

One of three sombre and meagre looking men leaning against a baker's gable, with the incense of the oven rising from the cellar, was Ned Ockleshaw.

He looked pinched about the cheeks ; his lips were bluish, and his dark eyes eager, as if under the strain of a continuous test of endurance. It was late in the afternoon, and he had not been home since he left at eight o'clock in the morning.

“ What was the use of going home ? ” he glumly argued. “ He had nothing to take, and there was nothing to get. How could there be anything, with only Sam's sick club—seven shillings or so—coming in, less three shillings and sixpence for rent, for five of them—six, with Mrs. Gummidge's little one ? That was the common-sense of the thing. How *could* there be anything ? A penny was a penny, and not even a woman—not even Nance—and much less two women—Nance and Rache—could turn a penny into a shilling ; and they were not like many women, ‘ ticking ’ it here and ‘ strapping ’ it there at shops, at every bit of a ‘ stret. ’ Poor lasses ! They deserved better ; but what was *he* to do ? Do ? Nowt but what they did, and that was clem the stoppage out as they had done times before. Thank God (this was merely verbal form—a sort of obsolete ritual—it was Nance he really thanked) they all had two bits a day, morning and night ; but if there were not three bits a day they mun tak' the two and think the third ! ”—and then, as if round-headed Ned had long resisted a certain reserve expedient, and was now entitled to indulge, he took out his short pipe, changed his shoulder against the gable to settle for another spell of galling idleness, and puffed with suppressed economical ardour the low-burnt charge that was already chiefly dust.

Mrs. Arkwright's wild-headed girl, Liza Ann, from Brookster's Yard, ran that way, and disturbed Ned's meditative puffs by singling him out from the other two men. Liza Ann was not only short of breath, but short of space, for she spoke from behind a mouthful of bread taken from a slice in her hand ; but she made Ned understand that he was wanted at home.

“ All reight, ” he muttered, without moving.

Liza Ann waited to be his escort, but as he still leaned against the wall gazing over some ground where lads were at football, she said :

“ Tha'rt to *come*. Th' missis wants thee. ”

“ All—reight, ” he repeated impatiently, and took a

whiff that seemed to settle him more firmly against the gable.

"Tha'rt to come *now*," called Liza Ann, taking another bite of bread.

"Get home!" he replied playfully, turning only his face to her. "*Get home wi' thee!*" he added, as if to a venturesome terrier that had dared to leave its kennel.

Rough-headed Liza Ann leaped three strides homeward, and then stood more than ever like the daring terrier, gazing defiance at him through her random, curly, flaxen hair.

"Aw'll throw sixpence at thee if tha don't run," said Ned; and the other two men's weak, indolent smiles passed on and off the grim surface of their hunger like a slow glint of clouded moonlight on and off the face of a crude crucifix of wood.

But Liza Ann stood in a smiling attitude of familiar defiance, which meant "I only wish you would!" and called to him:

"I've tell'd thee. Tha'rt to *come*. Tha'rt to come *now*. Tha doesn' know who's bin! Miss Waide—an' som'b'dy else, an' th' missis wants thee." And as a sort of keynote to the new situation at home Liza Ann took another enormous bite.

Scarcely was her hand from her mouth when a smart urchin in bare feet stole behind her, snatched the slice of bread out of her grasp, and ran off eating it.

Ned chuckled.

"Now tha'll go home," he called. And she did, crying.

Liza Ann, however, shortly returned.

She had another slice of bread and a square paper parcel. She handed the parcel to Ned and ran off laughing, as if, after all, she had gained her point.

Ned opened the parcel, and at the sight of bread—nay, big cold mutton sandwiches—he pressed out his pipe and put it into his vest pocket.

The other men, divining that something to eat had arrived, did not look his way. They looked down at their poor clogs, they gazed up at the gray, famished-looking sky—anywhere but at Ned. One, as a waft of the cold meat passed his way, could not resist a pleasant word or two, and he said:

"Tha'rt in fodder, Ned"; and yet, just because he had

said it, he jerked himself from the wall, and moved away as if his voice had committed his being to the appearance of cadging.

"Jim!" called Ned. "Jim! *Jimmie!* Have a bit o' meat. Aw tak' thy 'bacca. Come on, lad."

Jim sidled back, put his hand to the paper parcel as if he were drawing lots blindfolded, and took a sandwich.

"And here, Joe Hawkins," continued Ned, "thar'st got somethin' empty under thy mouth like the rest on us. Luck's come home to my little woman from somewheer—tak' a bit on it," and Joe Hawkins took one plain piece of bread. "Tak' the meat with it!" called Ned, "tha musn' leave the rarest o' the luck behind. Aw reckon my little woman thought on the three on us," he added, as Joe did as he was told, "and tha may be as pretty well sure as tha'rt of thy breath that she wouldn' send this heap if she couldn' very well spare it. Her's the best rationer as ever aw know'd. Her cupboards an' cuts the loaf hersen these times; an' every one on us has the same allowance to the inch—no less nor one another, an', by stars! no more, not a crumb. Her could ration a regiment o' flies in a famine, could my little woman, and as her doesn' believe in 'spout' or 'strap,' she mak's hunger and food a slack sort o' fit when things come to the stret."

"Different to my lass," said Jim. "Her puts clothes up th' spout to get out o' tick, and her gets more tick to get clothes out of spout. Her's a demon!"

"Aye, but how many youngsters hasta?" inquired Ned.

"True," replied Jim, under compulsion. "We've five—at present."

"Luk at that!" said Ned.

"Aye, it's a number; it mak's table look small i' th' day an' clothes-nails big at neight."

"Ay, an' the clog-shelf full," supplemented Ned. "Aw know there's some scrattin' wheer there's five over and above fayther and mother. My wife wonders how some on the women do it on their twenty-four, twenty-five, and twenty-seven shillin' a week."

"Don't talk o' twenty-seven," said Jim. "Aw lifted twenty-three the week afore the stop. Twenty-three, and aw've not touched a penny sin'."

"Then dunna blame thy little woman," said Ned.

"How *can* she do wi'out tick or someut wi' five of 'em afront on her? We men *can* come away and grin and bear it out here; but as to women, they *hev* to stay at whome and face youngsters; and youngsters haven't the sense to be hungry and say nowt; they out with it, and wheer are ye then? No, no; one woman *may* be better nor t'other in rationin', but the very best on 'em can't mak' twenty-five shillin' do the full week's work o' thirty. By God, it's hard! *Too* hard! There ought to be a meetin'. Aw just feel fed enough on that theer bread an' mutton to go on strike for a jump of ten per cent."

Jim and Joe laughed.

"Aw'm fair serious, lads. Tak' the cuttin' wheer aw work. Do what aw can wi' all I know—and aw'm no fool—aw *can't* get wage bill to show above twenty-six-an'-six. Twenty-six-an'-six, dang it! an' if aw didn' work hard for that—an' more—aw'd be ashamed to tell thee. Federation ought to meet and check mesters a bit while the new contracts are goin' a-seeking; if not, there'll be a sly cut on last year's price, tha may bet tha best boots, if tha hev any; and *tha* knows wheer the cut gets i' th' long run—it gets down i' th' pit; all over it; up to the backest back; and wheer the farthest on us 'is twistin' an' squeezin' out his sweat in a 30-inch hot seam, and can't keep the meat he eats on his bones for the wear an' tear on it. The on'y place the cut *won't* reach will be Beckerton Old Hall. They'll be all right theer. Oh, ay, I agree wi' our Sam; Federation ought to be first in the field with a demand."

"But look at stocks," said Jim dolefully.

"Big enough to help mesters against us for months," supported Joe.

"Aw wouldn' care a snap o' th' thumb if banks wor piled to heav'n!" answered Ned defiantly. "Aw'd check mesters *now* with a call for a rise to mak' 'em tender at fair rates; if not, what^a wi' big stocks, an' feightin' among mesters to get rid on 'em, someut tells me at the back on it all that there'll be a rush and a cut—and mayhap a pretty notice at th' pit-mouth for the likes o' us to read, mark, an' learn, as they say i' the church. By Tommy tinker, but it's darnation hard! *Too* hard. We've ear'd of devil havin' a pit, an' a pit as fires; well, aw sometimes think devil hissen has turned coal-mester, and is tryin' to

get it all his own way as he did in heav'n afore he wor turned to the right-about. He's been turned out o' theer ; in my opinion he now wants turnin' out of earth here. . . . There you are ! Look at that"—the Brookster carriage and pair were passing at the end of the street, with Mr. Dawbairn on his horse at the side—" *yon's* a feedin' sight for famished collier folk, isn' it ? That's the figure *they* cut ; an' that's the sort o' figure they ought to cut *down* a bit if things *are* as bad as mester makes it out to be ; but fall or no fall, flood or no flood, strike or no strike, good trade or bad, them theer chestnuts allus luk as if they get their corn ; an' if horses does, tha may bet tha head and body that t'other folk on two legs don't go short. Lads, lads, we're fooils—we're fooils for standin' it ; our poor faythers were fooils without knowin' it ; but we're biggest fooils, because we do. Hey, but, Jim and Joe, it sweats queer thoughts i'to *me* does the likes o' this. No wonner some folk *are* sent to the grave afore their time ; an' if a corpse can famish theer afore it knows what's goin' to happen in heaven or t'other place, aw'd just like our mester and Royalty Dawbairn theer to hev a good long clemmin' wait together afore the Almighty called 'em to a meal."

Jim and Joe laughed.

"Aw would ! In dead earnest, aw would ; they mak' me mad ! We're all colliers when we dee ; we all go down i' the cage to the little pit ; an' all aw want is that those who feast an' fatten on the colliers' clemmin' here should do a bit o' clemmin' down theer, an' then think back an' wish for a bite o' bread. If I wor e'en a chapel man aw'd wish it, aw would ; for aw know what my own flesh and blood are bearin', an' that's on'y one house in one yard i' Beckerton-'yond-Brow. Ay, aw'd call Federation *now*, if aw wor one o' the men's men. There's some'ut brewin', lads."

"Tha'rt allus on the alarm, Ned," said Jim.

"Well ?" asked Ned, awaiting a further development of the reproach.

But Jim modified it by saying :

"Of course, thee an' tha Sam do watch th' papers."

"Ay, an' watch men, too. Tak' this stoppage. The floodin' come'd by chance—aw know that ; but while it has come'd they're in no hurry ; they're givin' us a taste

o' waitin' : they're holdin' us off ; they're trimmin' us up to be starvin' glad to go in, an' when in to stick in at any price."

" Think so ? " asked Jim.

" Jim and Joe, lads, aw wor not born at seven o'clock this mornin'. You watch wi' all your eyes. It's brewin'—brewin' mischief. There's fire-damp in a pit, an' fire-damp out. Aw can well-nigh scent the masters' fire-damp out. It's gatherin'—it's comin'—and they think we mun go down on our hands an' knees beneath it, to keep clear ; an' if strike explosion comes they'll try an' say as *we* opened our lamps and blew off our own heads, an' brought want to the women an' bairns ! It's brewin' i' Yorksheer, i' Lankisheer, i' Darbysheer an' Wales. Mark my word, mesters are pullin' theer ropes ; an', by heaven an' earth, to say nowt o' t'other place, we mun pull ours. We mun pull ours together—ay, and pull with our hands and teeth, for it's goin' to be a tug-o'-war. You watch ! . . . Well, lads, aw'm off home," said Ned, moving, and left his two mates looking grim and glum against the wall.

CHAPTER XV

SAM'S SENTIMENTS

WHEN Ned reached home there was the sensation of Sunday about the unusually tidy kitchen and fireplace, the whiteness of Nance's and Rache's aprons, the primness of the patchwork quilt on the bed where Sam was lying (with Mrs. Gummidge's baby asleep at the foot), and the quiet Sabbath tidiness of old Daniel's head and black-and-white check neckerchief as he sat in the corner half dozing.

The only week-day features were a pair of Britton Lloyd's trousers which Nance was patching, and a stocking of his which Rachel was darning.

This impression of Sunday was so clear that when Ned entered he looked from Nance to Rachel, from Rachel to the fireplace, and from the fireplace to the kitchen as a whole, and said :

" What's up ? Who's comin' ? "

" It's who's bin," answered Nance. " We've had the quality. Miss Waide and—who d'you think ? *Mester*

Brookster's youngest—his own youngest, in this very kitchen; an' a little sweet nut of a thing her is—isn' her, Rache?"

Rache nodded her head.

"Isn' her, fayther?"

Old Dan, vaguely aided by his dim memory, shook his head slowly, and lifted his hand confirming every word of Nance.

"Isn' her, Sam?"

Sam did not answer; he allowed the verdict to pass, and eyed his father's gathering frowns.

"Maybe," called his mother in the direction of the bed, "tha's more partial to the tall un, lad—aw shouldn' wonner; anyhow, yon wee lady-lass is a treat for common eyes to look on—such a colourin'!—an' so deary dainty! Her face, wi' its two flushy cheeks, pea an' pea alike, put me in mind o' two things as is as different and yet as like as wax is to honey. It 'minded me first o' th' fairy's face aw saw year an' year ago i' waxworks; an' them, Sam, of the conny bells on yon tuft o' heath that tha brought one Sunday last year. The heath's wrinkly theer above mantel-shelf now, but when fresh drawn one o' the bells was yon little lady-lassie's cheek to a shape an' pink."

Ned's mouth twisted into a sneer, and it seemed to turn his words out in a coil as he said:

"Oh, we all know that the Brooksters hev the very pink o'—cheek."

Nance was shocked.

He flung down his cap like a gauntlet, and then, sitting with one leg over the corner of the table by the window, he concluded, "That's nowt new."

"Hey, but Ned Ockleshaw, man, don't speak like that wi' some o' th' Brooksters own good cold leg o' mutton inside thee, afear it warms up to life agen an' kicks thee. Fair's fair. Why, a mouse would at least squeak its thanks e'en to a cat as carried it meat. Yon dear innocent comed here wi' good feelin', an' we let her go wi' it, didn' we, Rachel? Oh, it's no use o' thee a-kickin' thy thick opinion down into thy leg like that, Ned. If yon Mr. Brookster's youngest came back this here minute, thy tongue would slink i'to th' back o' thy mouth like a dog i'to a kennel. Her sweetsomeness 'ud soon tak' that crabby swing out o' thy leg, an' tha'd be standin' straight

up wi' thy respect like all on us did—i'cept Sam i'bed theer, o' course ; though aw saw *him* tak' two good straight looks at her."

" Now thèn, mother——"

" Yea aw did, Sam ; an' at th' second look thy very eyes stood up on their tip-toes on thy lids an' above the quilt, lad—aw saw thee. And tha'd do just the same, fayther Ned, so don't frown an' growl thy republics on her behind her back, for if she comed, it 'ud be with thee as wi' Billy Brunt when Queen wor passin'—he chucked his republics i' the air wi' his cap, and cheered like the Toriest o' folk, an' voted bang wi' th' Conservative blues at next election ; an' that's what tha would do if Mester Brookster's youngest tripped in on us now. Tha'd pick thy sulky cap up ; tha'd stay thy grumblin' leg ; tha'd luk the straightest way for smilin'. So listen, man, an' dunna muffle thysen wi' temper afore theer's time to get at wheer tha keeps thy wits. Her an' Grace Waide—tha mun excuse me, Sam, it's come this tune agen, for her isn' a far-off 'Miss' to me—ay, fayther Ned, yon two has filled our cupboard for three days, that's all aw know ; an' what has a sweet wee chick of a smilin' innocent like yon to do wi' stoppage and wi' wage ? Don't grummel an' growl at her ; her's a girl—a child—an' a sweet un at that——"

" Ay, ay," interrupted Sam, with the slow deliberation of calm dissent. " But she has more years than she looks, mother. But a child—e'en a girl child—should be brought up i' the way it *should* go."

" Well, her's in good hands wi' Grace Waide," smartly retorted Nance, who just as smartly went off into the reverie, " Hey, but aw am sorry for yon Miss Grace ; aw didn' know till aw saw th' bonny round freshness o' Brewster's youngest that aw were so pinin' sorry for t'other. There's a some'ut, Sam, i' yon vicarage lassie's look as if her mind wor tryin' to get out i'to somebody else's, an' couldn'."

Sam quite unconsciously nodded his head in sorrowful agreement, and a flush ran up his face like a flag of distress as his little mother moodily repeated her one idea :

" Ay, just as if her mind wor tryin' to get out of her head and couldn'—dear heart."

" We were talkin' o' t'other," said Sam ; " an', for my

part, her head had finer feathers than her thoughts should wear if her heart had the true feelin' on things as they are 'twix us an' her fayther."

"Sam! Oh, Sammy, lad!" cried Nance. "That from thee, an' our cupboard full—an' after yon looks thee gave her! For shame, Sam!"

"'Twere yon very looks at her that convinced me. No, no, mother; 'twere very good on her to bring what she did bring—'twere a step in the right way—'twere adding a meal or two to fayther's last wage; but, seen straight through, mother, yon bread and mutton ought to hev bin *in* the wage. That's what I mean. We don't want back-due charity brought to us i' sealskin an' feathers every time there's a stop."

"Well done, by God!" bawled Ned, and laughed himself backward on the table and up again.

"Ockleshaw!" called lean little Nance, sitting bolt upright in her rocking-chair, and looking like an eager ferret on its hind-legs. "No heavenly familiars like that theer here! Speak i' that street-corners way only of one o' thy own common mortal sort an' size. Th' Almighty is'n a pit an' public mate, and if tha can't use Him for Sunday use, and it's a body-an'-soul pity tha didn't, aw'm well sure tha shan't rub dirty sho'ders wi' Him i' that week-day fashion here. Sam, Sam, lad, it's o' no use talkin' that way afore thy fayther; aw know *tha* means well, and *tha* understan's thy own meanin', but when what *tha* means comes out o' thy fayther theer in blasts-phemies, *I* say keep th' deep meanin's to thyself."

Ned fully sat upon the table, and now dangled both his legs, and rubbed his hands with the most enjoyable cynicism.

"Tha' mun kick an' rub," said Nance, bending to her patching again, "but yon takin' th' name in vain is i' *my* ear against my will, an' aw don't like it. Aw'd sooner thee come and slap me i' the face; but, of course, *tha* mun slap the Almighty. Tak' thee care, man, He—doesn'—slap—thee. He has a big hand when he begins."

"He doesn' seem to have big enough hand to slap mesters," answered Ned.

"Oh, tha'rt all 'mesters,' an' 'mesters'; and 'mesters' after that agen; an' 'mesters,' 'mesters' aback o' that agen. Aw'd wish tha'd talk o' some o' the men, sometimes.

Some o' *them* want a Divine Almighty smack or two i' the senses ; ay, and wi' both on His hands, too ; they're not all they should be, judgin' by what they are to their homes."

"What about tha own sort, little un?" asked Ned. "What about the women?"

"Nay, nay ; dunna call th' sort aw mean, my sort ; aw wouldn' own to 'em if they had the same name ; some women, like some men, want cleanin' up a bit, both inside an' out."

"Right, mother!" called Sam ; "right. Some on 'em. But tak' th' most on us, we're not as bad as we're reckoned to be ; and lots on us are a good sight better ! But aw do see it mun come to this, fayther, afore things mend to the full and all round. wi' capital an' labour—there mun be the same ring o' true conscience in both master and man."

"Well done, our Sam!" cried Nance.

"Wheer's th' conscience o' the men o' these days?" asked shaky old Dan, quivering under his own question.

"In the Federation, gran'dad," said Sam. "But where is the conscience of the mesters? Aw know wheer their conscience-money is—i' stocks an' shares, grinding more per cent. out o' more labour somewheer else."

"Hang an' dang conscience! Come to wage," said Ned. "Luk at it!"

"No, no ; hang wage a bit, fayther, and come to conscience all round, and tha'd soon get to the true wage."

"It's too low, now, 't any rate!"

"At times," said Sam sadly—"at times ; it really is at times. Colliers mun sweat hard—or want."

"Sweat as we may, if a flood-stop like this comes, we've nowt to fall back on. Unless it's on a sort of broken back, an' tha son gets on to sick fund just afore the stop! What would *we* have *now*, if it wor not for thee bein' i' the bed? Though there's piper to pay to the doctor yet."

Nance thought of her few precious shillings hidden away. Rachel looked across at her, and Nance darted, a cautioning glance as she mused, "Things mun be much worse afore that is touched."

There was a shy knock. It roused old Dan out of a dreamy and gloomy train of thought. "Is yon the van?" he inquired.

"What van?" asked Nance. "Hush!" she whispered, as Rachel rose; it may be Brookster's youngest back again; and, as Nance had predicted, Ned sprang off the table and stood like a volunteer at the word "ready."

Rachel went to the door. A woman's whisper passed Rachel and entered the kitchen like the humble appeal of the very spirit of good nature that was baulked and yet wanted to do its utmost to carry out a generous idea.

"Rachel, lass!" the travelling whisper lisped; is ta fayther in?"

"Yes," Rachel replied.

"Well, mother's going now——"

Nance, from her chair, sent Ned the merest whisper—
"To the Workhouse!"

"And aw thought if th' fayther had a bit o' dry 'bacca twist as the owd body could crummel i' to dust for snuff, 'twould tak' weariness off a bit when her were in."

"That aw have!" warmly called Ned, fingering his vest and going to the door. "It's but a nut of a piece, but it's last aw hev, an' her's welcome! Th' owd body's goin'?"

"Till things straight agen."

Nance whispered to Sam, slipped out by the back door, crossed some ground, went to a little shop, and was soon round by the front of Brookster's Yard.

"Here," she said, out of breath, "if a bit o' snuff will comfort poor owd 'Lizabeth, give her this o' the right sort, i' my name."

"Nance, woman! Aw didn' mean any on thee to spend——"

"Her's very wise to go in," said Nance.

"Well, as her says, an' what's too true enough," replied the woman, "her's on'y taking from the bare livin' food o' the bairns. Owd Betty Brunt is goin' in too."

"Nay?" said Nancy.

"Ay! They're goin' together."

"Why, aw thought her had saved?"

"Seems not."

"Ah, well, the owd folk can come out again. It isn' prison," said Nance. "It's on'y to bide better times a' bit."

The woman's lips quivered, and she turned away.

"Poor soul," muttered Nance, entering the house.

"Her's cut up above a bit," said Rachel.

"Her is," added Ned.

"Oh, it's—wrong," murmured Sam, losing control. "It's wrong! Hard picking, hacking, bending, and breaking work for a lifetime, and at the last—want, *want!* It's wrong! It's a wage of sin as forces real honest folk to that—a wage of sin!"

Sam's father, mother, and Rachel heard those exclamations, but did not heed. They stood far more anxiously watching old Dan in the corner on the left. He was stooping over his chair, on which was spread a red cotton handkerchief.

He was packing an old book, a few worn-looking letters, and a dingy black cravat that he had worn at his wife's funeral.

Ned nudged Nance to speak—to stop him.

"What tha doin', fayther?" she asked.

He did not reply.

"Fayther, man, what tha doin'?"

"Goin' o'er yonder," he answered, folding the handkerchief.

"Wheer?"

"O'er yonder—aw'm i' the way—tha'st more mouths nor meat here, sin' Ned's out."

Ned shuffled to the front-door, and out.

"If tha folds yon hankerchief any more," said Nance playfully, "aw'll fold thee; aw'll put thee double i'to cupboard, and turn key on thee. Nonsense, fayther! Put thy pets o' things back this minute! Why, see thee here" (and Nance dangled a sock that she brought from a sly hole in the wall). "Brass, owd lad, brass; it's brass; on'y aw don't tell our Sam and Ned their everything, or they'd be expectin' beef an' suet dumplin' to keep 'em in fettle for frettin'. Things are not bad enough for 'o'er yonder.' They've been worse. Far worse. Rachel, lass, here's a shillin'; run for a pound o' nice sweetbreads, aw've a hard fancy for 'em for supper to-night. Aye, sit thee down, an' *settle* down, or aw'll give thee a bit o' my body as well as my mind, owd man! O'er yonder, indeed! Graveyard, if tha lives; but work'us, no! There's still brass i' my hose bank, even if bad gets worse."

CHAPTER XVI

RACHEL'S ACTS

BEFORE dawn next morning Rachel lay awake, secretly waiting to hear the shrill half-past five alarm whistle of Rasselton Mill, which, in a sustained, persistent, monotonous, monotone note very much in the minor, insisted upon telling the workers of Beckerton-beyond-Brow that it was time to get into their clothes.

At the first jerky hint upon the quiet air that the steam-whistle was about to begin, Rachel rose as silently as a bird alights, and secretly dressed as quietly as a bird trims its quills.

She dressed in the roughest short skirts that she had, the thickest stockings, retucked Mrs. Gummidge's sleeping baby in the bed, and very quietly went downstairs in her stocking-feet.

Rachel glanced at Sam. She was thankful that he was asleep. The same glance told her that he had been reading his "Tod's Student's Manual" and "Cobbett's Grammar" until the grammar had fallen from his grasp, and the deserted candle had burned down, leaving the dwarfed brass candlestick like a lava-streaked crater.

"Poor Sam! Aw wonner if the lad will do owt but read agen," passed across Rachel's mind as she slyly slipped on Sam's own biggest pit jacket.

To be ready to warn Sam to be quiet in case he awoke before she was ready to go, Rachel eyed him as she pinned a red shawl about her head and neck, and tied a cord about her waist to keep the jacket close for working comfort; and that done, she stepped lightly to the low cupboard for a piece of hearth chalk.

While stooping there, her mother's words, "There's a someut, Sam, in yon Vicarage lass's look as if her mind wor tryin' to get out of her head an' couldn'," came to her.

Rachel rose and looked hard at Sam.

"Why, that is just as Sam hissen looks—now—in his sleep," she concluded. Then she wrote in very large hand, right across the little round table, "Gon to camel hump pit."

With her clogs in her hand she slipped into the back kitchen, noiselessly opened the back-door ready, lifted a parcel of bread that she had cut and hidden the night before, reached Sam's can with some dry sugar and tea ready at the bottom, stepped out, closed the door, put on her clogs, and made off in the semi-darkness across the black, uneven ground, to dip, as others were dipping like black flies on black cloth, by a path to the canal.

The struggling sun seemed to be rising in the sky-like canal as well as in the canal-like sky, with the long horizontal rifts and bars of cloud in both; and one unseen sparrow was awake as if by mistake, chirping good cheer to the gloomy gloaming of the smoke-smear'd dawn.

Men, youths, girls and women were already crossing the little canal bridge. They expanded to the right and left of the mouth of the bridge like the opening of a black fan with the women's head-shawls for points of red. Only the women and girls talked; and they talked as if they had never been to sleep. The men and youths went glumly on as if they had never in all their lives been fully awake.

One young man, however, awoke suddenly as he overtook Rachel.

"Anwyl! anwyl!" (Dear! dear!) he muttered to her. "Is it so? or is it no?"

"Hullo, Britton?" she said, as if he had only overtaken her on the way to the grocer's.

"What's the world's mischief of this, dear girl?"

"No mischief. When tha told me yesterday about Chris Collins goin' off ill, aw thowt if th' overlooker would put me on th' cage till she betters, aw'd begin."

"I am sorry in my heart that I told," said Britton, with trembling Welsh tones of regret. "You'd be doing more good by half at home. *I'm* on at Camel Hump, as you know, Rache, this week . . . and in all consciences! . . . You know, girl . . . if it comes to the pinch . . . I've a bit . . . and what's mine is yours—already. Go back, lass!"

"Not I, 'less they wanna tak' me on," answered Rachel, striding forward with new force. "Tha doesn't live at our house, Brit. Sam badly; fayther gettin' i'to tempers; mother short-'lowanc'd; owd Dan a-pickin' an' packin' up for union, and me puttin' in time cleanin' i'stead o' cookin'. No, Brit! The woman mun work if

man mun play and the sick tak' death-like holiday. It's now't; aw've done it afore, as mother did it afore me agen."

"But, lass, lass, wouldn't you rather much more the Rasselton mill?"

"Aw'd rayther first as comes. What does want know of mine or mill? Want isna proud. Her says work!"

"You've put your head to it, Rache. You mean it."

"Ay, an' aw'll put my shoulder, too, if they'll gi'e me a chance," she replied, as they joined a rapidly-increasing band of now whistling youths, laughing girls, and silent men, all converging upon a black path of black puddles towards the stark black wood framework of the shaft. The lit-up engine-house was like a great yellow lantern in the gloom, and the escape-pipe was blowing off the superfluous gray breath of waiting force.

"How's Sam?" asked Britton, as they entered the local intensified gloom of the dark up-rights and cross-beams.

"Sickly, aw think," answered Rachel, as they by faith ascended an invisibly black open-air stairs that seemed to be built out of Night to mount to the Day then beginning to gleam on the upper girders and stays. "Sickly. He looks badly on it. He's worritin'. He isna better by the time he thowt to be, aw fancy."

"I'll come and give a tune."

"Not to-night, lad. Miss Waide is comin' to read. But come, o' course. Tha can listen like the rest on us. Hey, my, here we are. Wheer's gaffer? Aw'll try my luck."

Rachel was allowed to take Chris Collins's place. It was up on an elevated iron-plated platform over the pit mouth, where the cages came up and down like the restless weights of some stupendous clock whose dial was the sky.

She took up her position with two other pit-brow girls and three youths at the shaft mouth. She saw her Britton enter a cage, sink from her level, and with an upward farewell glance abruptly dip into that deep, impenetrable funnel of darkness, where the shining travelling steel rope was in the core of its darkness, like the hazardous thread of life on which he and others in the cage verily hung.

Rachel knew that her Britton would have to travel along passage, up jigger, up rise, and down dip for twenty minutes before he could reach the cornered cutting where

he worked far away, deep beneath the wood and hillock that were beginning to show green in the morning beams, nearly two miles away.

Rachel's work was to meet the cage coming up the shaft with its loaded trucks, and, with another girl, wheel a truck to the weighing-machine, call the tally number to the weigher, wheel the truck to the end of the platform; tip the coal down a shoot, take back the "empty," wheel it into the next descending cage, meet the ascending cage, take off another full truck, weigh it, tip it, bring it back, jerk it into the descending cage, meet the ascending cage; take off another full truck—and so on, and so on, from six o'clock in the morning until half-past three in the afternoon, with pauses for breakfast and dinner.

Now and then the three young women in their short skirts and men's coats sang on their elevated shut-in platform, like birds in a cage; now and then the youths joined in the song; now and then the overlooker's voice drilled them, and then would be heard only the whirl of the revolving shaft wheel, the dithering of the rope, the rattle of the cage, the bass rumbling of the full trucks on the iron-plate platform, and the tenor rumbling of the empty ones—and on the round went until the sun changed sides in the sky.

When Rachel was released, dirty, dusty and miry, and as if some invisible sprite had specially powdered her with jet-black rouge about the mouth and nostrils, her arms and back ached, and her knees trembled; and yet she trudged homeward with that spiritual satisfaction of the conscience which labour, at times, even more than worship, seems to have the special prerogative to give.

At home, her mother met her with reproaches that became notes of admiration, and notes of admiration that became modified reproach. But she also met her with a savoury tea-dinner of meat and potatoes roasted into a harmonious blend of flavour and brown in the baker's everybody's oven.

Nance called Rachel sly; her father said she was a brick; old Dan, a true lass with the right old sort o' stuff; and Sam said he would charge her rent for the use of his pit coat.

Rachel laughed at it all, finished her tea-dinner, and, with Mrs. Gummidge's bairn hammocked in her lap, sat by

the fire absorbing rest and heat, getting ready for sleep, and for the half-past five whistle in the morning; but in the meantime awaiting Miss Waide.

"Post!" called Sam.

"Aw wor thinkin' of our Dick this very mornin'!" said Nance, as she took the letter and handed it to be read to Sam. "It *is* Dick, isn' it, Sam?"

"Ay," answered Sam, opening the letter, and he read aloud:

"DEAR MOTHER,

"Our redgment is ordered north, pass Moreside some time Tuesday, would like to see Sam and father, too far for you. I've a beauty of a black horse now. No more at the present. Hoping granfather's well—all, in fact. Sometime Tuesday, Moreside—afternoon I fancy.

"Yore dear sun,

"DICK."

"Hey!" sighed Nance, "but aw *would* like to clap eyes on our Dick!"

"Tha looks as if tha'd like to clap on wet uns, lass," said Ned.

"Aw should!" answered Nance. "Tha'll go on Tuesday, fayther; aw'll give thee brass to buy an ounce of 'bacca for th' lad . . . and don't come back pretendin' tha had no chance to give it, like last time. Tha mun mek chance, and Dick'll help thee out if tha lets him *see* tha has someut sweet for him. Hey, but Dick, lad!" again sighed Nance, "aw don't know which is nearer everyday death—sodger, sailor, or collier; but God bless thee! . . . Aw think aw'll tramp to Moorside mysen, after all."

CHAPTER XVII

OTHER PLATFORMS

EARLY that same morning two other creatures—Grace Waide at the Vicarage and Dora Brookster at Beckerton Old Hall—were awake working on elevated platforms; but they were platforms of thought, platforms of longing, platforms of ideals; nevertheless, platforms on which the

spiritual strife was severer in its tension than even the physical strife of Rachel with her trucks.

Rachel was doing her duty, and was happy; but both Grace and Dora held off aghast from their moral duties, and were wretched.

Grace awoke to the persistent dogging of an old wish. It would not allow her to rise. She lay in bed awake—musing—wishing—and yet as if in airy suspension over dreams. Thoughts moved within her, making their own mute speech. She followed them—listening—muttering their words—as they flitted to and fro like the very sprites of the spirits over her great possibilities upon that day of all others. She heard them say, as if in Sam Ockleshaw's voice: "Are you still afraid to speak? Still too pitiful because he is your parent? Heed. Think! Time is passing; events are moving; life is moulded by your momentary acts. You are eager to be true, and yet you halt. You desire your father to know fully what a new creature you have become in the attitude of man to man, but you speak not. Yet the truth should be told, for the truth was ordained to prevail. You have struggled once with him, and you impressed him for a little while; but the world lured him back, and he is again in the coils. A second strife appals you, for you know it would be worse than the first, because his return to the old ways is changing your silent protest into a rebellion of contempt. You know now why the poor sometimes sneer. 'Tis but the soul recoiling. Yours recoils at times, even from—him. You know, too, that to live even once through that brief sneer of the spirit was a torture that aged in one instant all your early ideals, and left them wrinkled and warped. Where now is that noble father whom you once adored as an earthly image, at least, of the heavenly one? Where that Church of Christ, which you once revered as being true in word and deed to *the* Church, heaven itself? Ah, poor one! This was the false father, and this the false Church foisted by a worldly world upon your ignorance. Those illusive ideals have fled, and realities more truly ideal, because vital and growing, have taken their place. And yet you long, you pray. The very prayers which he presents as petitions for others you present for him. But he seems untouched. The light of the true light does not illumine his life. He lives in the veiling twilight of the conventions

of the world. You know he does. He reads aloud, "Thou shalt not steal," but he heeds not the subtlety of indirect thefts in these days of double dealing; he repeats, "Thou shalt do no murder," but heeds not the degrees of the slow murder which man commits upon under-paid, and therefore under-fed, labour. Sunday after Sunday he reads with plaintive voice, 'We have followed too much the *devices* and *desires* of our *own* hearts; we have offended against Thy holy laws; we have left undone those things which we ought to have done; and we have done those things which we ought not to have done.' But week-day after week-day comes, and he appears not to see that this applies to the hourly practical business devices and desires of his rich bosom friends.

"Ay, how are you to get the light of the true light of the primal Christianity of Christ into the inner being, which is so darkened by the crowding associations of really unchristian life, that the eye sees evil and mistakes it for good; sees wrong and reads it as right; beholds the individual free-will injustice of one man towards the many—and attributes that to the will of God? How, indeed? Think of it. Why, dear alienated soul, you have to veritably kiss that same apostate father this very morn; to hear him at prayers, to break God's bread with him, and seem at one, at peace, with him.

"Ah, you yourself surely are only removed by a degree from the same stubbornness as his own; you yourself are so shadowed by the local ramifications of your once dear home that, though you see the truth as it is and was in Christ, you cannot speak of it as it is in—man. Pooh, pooh, weak one! You are unworthy of the cause; you are feeble—nay, you are false!"

Suddenly thrusting her face deep into the pillow, Grace moaned to the haunted depths of floating darkness that she beheld there. Her very lips bit the linen in the throes of longing for strength—courage—speech—for some of the daring of the saints—nay, for some of the righteous honesty of sincere Sam. Upon one sob rushed out a prayer, and upon another the answer rushed in. Mystical power! Where now was the old fear? Gone with the night. Where the moral valour? Come with the morning. She rose. "Come in! come in!" she almost said aloud to the sunbeams as she drew aside her curtain, "Come in!

come in ! ” she almost cried to the breeze as she opened her room-window like a door, and breathed the refreshing waft as gladly as her eyes had absorbed the light.

Yes ; her heart was perfectly frank. She was face to face with Truth, and could look it in the eyes without a blink. Who and what were these creatures down yonder pits, from which the steam and gas rose from the air hole like their breath ? Men—fathers—brothers—beings—souls. Ay, she would go downstairs and speak as honest Sam Ockleshaw would. The hour had come, and with it the fulness of being that made the process right, the moment opportune, and the place sacred and apt. That morning her father should know her as she truly was.

And yet that morning her father did not rise. He was unwell. He wished to be quiet and alone.

* * * * *

Dora's conflict was high up on the ethereal platform of Love. Mr. Dawbairn had proposed to her. He had proposed to her on the previous night, and he was a guest in the house that morning, virtually awaiting her word.

What was her word to be ? Yes or No ? No or Yes ?

Her two possibilities in life were like two dice in a box, one black and the other white ; the black dice with gold sovereign-like dots on one side, and the other sides blank. That dice represented wealthy Mr. Dawbairn. The white dice was blotted on all sides with little red roses and hearts, and represented Mr. Rew. She cast up her two possibilities, and down they came—the roses and hearts always in view, the gold only now and then. But when the golden dots did appear she dwelt upon them the longer for their rareness. Nay, once when they appeared she would not again cast up her thoughts lest the golden dots should not come. Then she hid her face, and felt as if she could not be purified until she took a card-portrait from a pure ivory casket, on which were carved two doves, and gazed at it. She gazed at the portrait until, in mood at least, her own face and eyes reflected it, and thereby looked as grave and earnest as Mr. Rew's ; and yet even then—even then—the golden dots floated about her exaggerating fancy like the magnified gold-fish coming and going in the round of a crystal sphere.

As a sort of charm to keep her from the evil of gold all that day, she cut down the portrait to the size of a well-flapped, well-hidden pocket of her purse ; and yet even

then—yea, even then—the rest of the purse, with its gold and silver frankly open to view when unclasped, was as the Ark of the Covenant with her father and mother, with society and the world.

As Dora was leaving her room she met her mother leaving hers.

Her mother embraced her with more pressure of arms and lips than usual. The extra pressure was the thought of Mr. Dawbairn finding its way out of Mrs. Brookster without the awkwardness of speech.

In the warm, full arms of her mother little Dora was like a pressed grape. The very wine of her better life came to her eyes. The mother murmured good cheer, and wiped the wine of her daughter's better life from her eyes; she patted her with courage; she stroked her with gratitude in advance of the event; and, meeting Bertha leaving her room to the battle-call of the breakfast-gong, the three of them went down the broad staircase outwardly intertwined like the three Graces but inwardly far more like the grim Laocōon.

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There was yet another human being strenuously struggling on a high platform that morning, and that was the head of the Brookster household, the head of the Brookster firm.

His platform was far afield in the intricacies of Finance. He, like Rachel, was working trucks of coal; but his great problem was how to work them along the railway lines, north and south, at the cut-down prices at which two shipping and gas contracts had been closed with fear and trembling, and yet with a daring very like the recklessness of greed, on the previous day.

To make sure, Mr. Brookster had sent in his tenders at sixpence per ton less than he thought any other proprietor would submit. That sixpence per ton off the two contracts secured would reduce his receipts by £10,500. In other words, had the two contracts been accepted at sixpence per ton more, Messrs. Brookster, Son, and Co. would have banked £10,500 over and above what they could at the reduced rate. How was that sum of £10,500 still to be banked?

That was the senior Brookster's problem. It was that problem to which he awoke in the night, to which he rose in

the morning, and which he could not dash off even at the coldest crisis of his morning bath.

To think that *he* should be deprived of that £10,500! To give it to shipping was like throwing it into the sea; to give it to Corporation gas was like burning it into air. To still put it into the bank would be a good stroke of business and sound commonsense.

But how to do it was the question, and he once more asked that question just as if a conclusion which he had already secretly arrived at had not already answered it.

Ay, how was the sum of £10,500 still to be banked, or put into American or Australian investments, where, by further gambling with God's own capital—the land and labour—it would bring a big interest?

He conscientiously mused a little. By doing so he could say he had tried to find a way out. Well, what were the conditions around?

It was certain that Dawbairn's royalties on all Becker-ton coal could not be cut—they were secured to him and his heirs by sacred agreement—moreover, they were coming back into the Brookster family through Dora. There was no way out there. Nor could Beckerton Old Hall be cut in any one of its many departments. Under no circumstances whatever. For there were now Bertha's prospects to consider; and Harry's, too. There was really no need to cut that, or the house up on High Cragwold, or the house in London. He had, of course, abundance for them all without the extra £10,500—nevertheless, it was worth getting if it could be got.

Nor could Dora's dowry be cut—heavens, no!—'twould scare Dawbairn; 'twould be the talk of county and town. That would have to stand good. Then, what could be cut?

Hang it all! as he had decided before—the working expenses! He didn't like doing it (because he had done so much of it already), but it was of no use running away from the fact: it would have to be done. He would have Carson in the office, and put on the screw from the engine at the top to the pit ponies at the bottom, and on all the workers who came between.

Having thus confirmed his previous conclusion; Mr. Brookster went down to breakfast. The enthusiasm of his final decision was like a tonic, and with unusual glow in his face he briskly greeted Bertha, Dora, Mr. Daw-

bairn, a lemon sole, a chop, two rounds of hot toast, and three cups of strong tea.

Then, in comfortable prostration on his back, he, from the pew of the breakfast-room couch, offered to the gods of good digestion the incense of a good cigar.

On that very couch, and in the rings and whorls of that very incense, an old private and confidential idea came to him with fresh clearness.

"Ay, of course; there is that other way out. If the contracts *won't* 'pay'—there is the coal on the bank. Sell that at an advance for 'household'—and there you are! But how get that advance? There was under-selling all round, even in 'household,' too. . . . One plan would bring the advance twice over . . . ay, three or four times over . . . and that was a——"

He and his idea swerved off the couch. He lit another cigar. The first five vigorous puffs were really words, though expressed only in smoke; and they said:

"A strike! Ay, a strike"; and Mr. Brookster rang for the office brougham half an hour before his customary time.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE SCREW

THE screw was very much put on at all the Beckerton pits. The day workers at four shillings and four shillings and sixpence per week were more wantonly watched and more briskly bullied in and out of their burrows.

The piece-workers were moved from seam to seam and cutting to cutting; with the one purpose of forcing more out-put at less cost.

Men were even put on hard coal, and told that it was soft, and so much per yard was knocked off the rate of pay.

This was done at Camel Hump pit to Britton Lloyd. He protested, and he was sent home. A man from Brookster's yard, made less independent by two weeks' want, was put in his place.

Britton, in his rebellious Welsh way, when roused, complained at headquarters. That did more harm than good. He was a marked man; and when he again applied for a cutting he was now put to work in a wet hole, now in

a hot hole, now up a jigger, where the roads were broken, and now at a step, or geological fault, where there had been an earthquake lurch of one of the shoulders of the seam.

Then, upon some dogmatic decree about the easy character of his place, his rate per yard was reduced one week; and in the next, upon another plea, the yards themselves were cut down on the bill that was to inform the wage-payer how much Britton Lloyd was to draw.

Britton again dared to complain at headquarters. He was told to talk of something that he understood. The measurer-up had made that return, and it would have to stand; and stand it did, at a cost of about seven shillings to Britton Lloyd.

Britton was a bachelor, but it was noted with sly, bitter, ironical humour among the colliers that it was the married men, the men with large families, who were usually picked out for special screwing treatment.

For the very-much-married men had greater self-control than bachelors; they did not protest; they did not lose their tempers; they did not shoulder their picks and make for the shaft and home. No, no; the married man had to bear, submit, and strive all the more fiercely for the sake of those at home who would be glad of the food he could earn almost under any circumstances whatever.

Yes, at the Beckerton pits the miners and their drawers worked more feverishly; the pony-lads and ponies were driven faster; the trucks were rattled along the pit lines quicker; the shaft cages were charged and emptied more briskly; they shot up the shaft more swiftly; and at the pit-mouth Rachel and others received them, wheeled them along the iron-plate platform, and tipped them, under the increased fidgety watchfulness of the bank-head man, who was urged to growling severity lest a block to the brisker work along the ways and at the shaft bottom should take place, and the manager cast the blame upon him and his pit-brow youths and girls.

Many a collier went homeward as Britton Lloyd went—with underclothes limp and absolutely wet with the sweat of cooped-up toil, the body half feverish, half chilled; stiff, cramped, partly bent, with something of the shape of the corner in which it had worked still about it; the face so black with layers of coal-dust upon layers of sweat, that even Britton's black hair looked brown; the lips

caked, the moustache, brows, and lashes loaded with clotted black powder. The only things apparently left human about him were his pathetic-looking peeping eyes, gazing out of the griminess with a bright cleanliness that recorded the still surviving heart and soul of the man.

Many a collier went home, as Britton Lloyd did, almost too fagged to wash : certainly too worn to eat with heartiness, and at bed-time too wearied to catch the much-needed sleep.

Britton's physical aches seemed to get into his brain, and instead of sleeping he lay thinking all his coal-getting over again, with the galling thoughts that the outside world did not seem to know or care about the strife, and that there was not freedom of speech in the pit or out. Virtually none, for the want of food, clothes, and shelter kept his and others' lips sealed in the bitterness of silence over the local details of that daily oppression which, despite great labour, kept the collier's wages low.

Britton was not naturally spiteful, but in the dead of the night, when sleep would not come, when his aches made him think and his thoughts made him ache—he, in the passion of hot rebellion that overwhelmed his fancy at times, pictured the underlooker fast beneath a "fall," moaning for help, and moaning in vain while the pit-boys whistled and sang him to death.

Fevered into midnight protest by the galling dominance of the man who had the harshness of a brute on behalf of the masters, that picture came as if upon the involuntary flow of the blood. With a shrug he tried to cast the picture away ; but there it was—and the tears of penitence for the mere thought of it came into his eyes.

Britton slept. He saw the underlooker dead in a field. He felt his own feet sinking into the sodden, sucking-in clay, unable to make off. He saw his dear Rachel a white-haired old woman at sweet eighteen, in consequence of his deed ; and he awoke with a delirious shout of pain.

CHAPTER XIX

IN THE PITS—AND OUT

DEEP in the coal-pits of Lancashire, Yorkshire, Derbyshire, Worcestershire, and North Wales, far away in those black underground cities of darkness, where the narrow streets are so low that man has to stoop, where he has to be a lamp to his own feet, where he has to go almost naked because of heat, and have the breath of life pumped down to him because of gas, and where his companion four-footed little colliers, the ponies, become cramped, dwarfed, and blind; far, far away in those thickly populated and subterranean cities under the cities and dales of England and Wales, where man, with a daring that is of the brute, a trust that is of the angel, and a power that is, verily, even of God, scoops the primeval forests out of their beds to give fire to the hearths, steam to the works, and light to the nights of the surface cities of the earth; deep and far away in the dark, in the damp, in the dense air of alley-like cuttings and dungeon-like corners, there moved to and fro, from man to man, through quiet passages and ways, along busy truck-lines and up echoing shafts, the growls of protest, the murmurs of revolt, the ironical hums of defiance and half-cynical songs of cool-headed courage.

Old ditties were revived. Britton Lloyd set "Cheer, boys, cheer!" going the round of Camel Hump Pit; it passed up the shaft and overland to No. 1 and No. 2, and into the homes and streets of Beckerton. Old weavers wondered if the days of the cotton famine were turning back in Time, and a very old Chartist, with his long full gray hair, passed through dreamy resurrections of social strife as he leaned his head upon his hand and dandled his great-grandchild on his knee to the tune.

Outside of the pits there was what the newspapers called an impending coal crisis. The proprietors having under-contracted each other on the right and left, now began to think of a common ground of action.

They met. They met much as European monarchs sometimes meet, with a smile of peace masking the grin of war. The situation was grotesque. Each man had

his own very pronounced private opinion of the other. " *He* was a Judas ; *he* a Peter ; and *he*—oh, a very devil of a deceiver in the way of the back-door tricks of trade." But it was most essential that, for further highly critical business purposes, these same gentlemen should appear to the British and foreign public as a highly-respectable, honest-minded, earnestly-endeavouring, but most grievously-injured, body as a whole ; and as they were about to appeal for business justice as if it were alms to save them from falling headlong down the mine-shafts of bankruptcy and the vacant coal-cuttings of ruin, these gentlemen smothered their pronounced private opinions of each other. Judas shook hands with Peter, the cock of conscience crowed within in vain, the devil shook hands with them all, and warm with the Satanic salutation, they, with their tongues in their cheeks, resolved to mock-righteously demand—a reduction of wage.

Then those honest-minded gentlemen put on their gloves of decorum, their silk hats of propriety, buttoned up the still small crow of the now mere cockerel of a conscience deep beneath their frock-coats, and tried to appear to the public eye as if they had been to a religious service, where they had become convinced of the Truth, the whole Truth, and nothing but the Truth, so help their——

Not long after that the colliers came up from the pits to read what had been posted up at the pit-mouth as solemnly as if it were a call to united prayer on the complex question of profit and loss ; but it was a half-hypocritical notice that on and after a certain date in the balmy and beautiful July a reduction of twenty-five per cent. on the current rate of wages would be made.

Although the men were vaguely aware of possible war, the definite words of that definite notice passed from the pit-banks to the pit-houses, and through village and town, and over hill and down dale, in various parts of England, with something of the terrors of the date fixed for the execution of a father, a son, or a friend.

It was telegraphed north, south, east, and west : it was cabled to America, Australia, and New Zealand ; and the hearts of far-off colliers' kith and kin there answered with hopeful, anxious beats. Mothers, wives, and sisters at home trembled. Mothers in Wales prayed that the masters would withdraw the shadow from over their sons in

Yorkshire and Lancashire mines. Anxious, crude, ill-spelt letters passed to and fro, giving cheer, hoping the best.

Many of the men laughed at the notices as if at an artificial ghost. It was only a piece of nonsense to play the bogey. Twenty-five per cent. off? More like twenty-five per cent. on! They would see who were masters at that.

Man responded to man, pit to pit, district to district, county to county, and Wales to England. To submit would be wrong. To fight would be right. They knew the mean, selfish motives—the absolutely immoral motives—at work behind that notice. To submit would be like compounding a financial felony, and committing themselves to the weekly prospect—sometimes to the weekly certainty—of a wage that would leave their children without sufficient food and the grocer without pay—one inhuman, the other dishonest, and both wrong.

Then the final hour—lingered—and passed, and out the men came from the mines like wasps from their nests, and with something of the wasp's moodiness—many of them with something of the wasp's sting.

Possibly not one collier in all the thousands brought out his tools with a really light heart, but all at least brought them out with a light conscience.

Some, on the strength of that, made a show of rejoicing. But it was only show. Deep down was a dread beneath their courage—not quelling it, but haunting it—the dread that the masters might, after all, prove as determined as themselves.

Next day the younger boys and girls of Beckerton-beyond-Brow, taking up the forced fun and enthusiasm of their fathers at home, at street corners, and gable-ends, decked themselves in bits of ribbon, dingy remnants of Sunday sashes, and any worn-out semi-gala gaiety they could find in bedroom cupboards and boxes; and, piloted by a red-headed lad, who had hit upon both a rhyme and an old tin can, they went in and out of the yards, alleys, and streets singing, in the genial spirit of an extremely social revolution:

“ Hip, hip, hip, hooray!
 My fayther's whoam to play;
 We won't go whoam till mornin',
 We won't go whoam till mornin',
 We *won't*—go *whoam*—till *mor-or-nin'*!
 For—fayther's whoam to play!”

Mothers who heard the children tried to enter into this ignorance that was bliss, but knowledge would not let them. The memory of the low funds in hand, the small stock of food in the house, the rules of business with the baker and grocer, dogged their outlook upon everything; so much so, indeed, that even thus early in the struggle many a mother of children secretly prayed "God help us! God mak' mesters yield—for men won't. God mak' mesters to yield—for my man won't. God mak' mesters to yield—for my man shouldn't."

That beautiful July evening, when the glowing effects of the long, slow, reluctant sunset were still lingering like a flushed after-thought in the comparatively smoke-clear sky at Beckerton-beyond-Brow, Ned Ockleshaw, after a hard day's work of idleness, busily spent in heated talk in the shaded street corners, entered his kitchen to settle down for the night.

His old father at once became nervously restless; and with scorn, which the old man could not hold in check any longer, he said with vocal and physical vibration from his armchair:

"Ugh! Shame on thee, man! Aw tow'd thee that thee an' thy shot-headed, short-sighted, shoutin' sort would bring mischief betwix' thee an' thy bread. Shame, shame on thee!"

"Oh, hush, hush, grandfayther!" said Nance. "Ned's only one. He isn't the whole of everybody else i' the Federation as well."

"But aw can't hush, and aw won't hush! He's done mischief——"

"Talk sense, owd man!" said Ned.

"Sense! An' uncommon sense, too!" hotly replied Dan, trembling with aged passion trying to be young.

"Ned," called Nance, "keep thy tongue in *thy* sense; and, grandfayther, thee keep thine i' yours. Words won't mend it."

"Words hev *unmended* it," said old Dan.

"Hush, hush, grand-dad!" appealed Rachel. "Never heed, fayther; sit thee down, an' say nowt."

"Ay, say nothing," said Sam from the bed; "he's been frettin' all the night."

"An' no wonner!" called Dan, shaking beyond control in his chair, and with the choking emotion of dotage in

his voice. "No wonner! Tha'rt all agen me; all on ye; an' aw'm on'y talkin' for thy daily bread. Shame, shame on thee, Ned Ockleshaw!"

"Let him talk," whispered Sam.

"A good fortune that thy owd mother, who could hev show'd thee how to work in a pit, an' be satisfied wi' *nine*; and not nineteen or nine-and-twenty shillin', a week, is under her stone. Tha's done a wrong; tha's put down the first malt for the brewin' o' mischief; tha's laid the first stone of the foundation for a buildin' o' ruin; tha's made a strike that'll hit back on thee——"

"Oh, hold thy waggin'!" called Ned, losing patience. "It isna a strike," he added, learnedly severe; "it's a lock-out."

"I'd mak' it a lock-up for such as thee. Shame on thee and all thy senseless set! If trade's bad, how can mesters mak' it good? They know trade better nor thee. Tha ought to hev stayed on to earn someut for thy wife and sick Sam theer. Why, in my days——"

"Hush, hush," urged Nance, even putting her arm around Dan's neck and her hand before his mouth; but the old man, with increased contempt, said, as if right through Nance's thin hand:

"Ugh, ay! I' *my* days——"

"Sense, sense—speak sense!" shouted Ned.

"Grandfayther, listen," called Sam; "tha'rt behind the times——"

"Aw wish aw were behind colliers! Why, in my days——"

"Howd thy harpin' clitter-clatter about thy days!" retorted Ned. "These are these days; my days, if tha likes. Why, if mesters i' thy fool days said to thee, 'We'll tak' twenty-five per cent. off thy skin,' tha'd have stripped thysens to be flayed, an' never ass'd for e'en thy rags again."

"Men are men, an' mesters are mesters."

"Ay, thank God, men *are* men!" called Ned.

"Most on 'em," said Sam, with mental reserve.

"Right, Sam; not all," put in Nance, who very, very economically began to peel a few of a new bag of potatoes for supper.

"Let it drop!" appealed Rachel, knitting; but old Dan turned in his chair and specially addressed Sam.

“Tha talk about rich an’ poor, and tha pretend to go by Scriptures on it; how doesta do wi’ our Savyur’s own sayin’ as poor ’ud *allus* be wi’ us?”

Ned roared. Nance frowned. Rachel became restive.

“Now, fayther, none o’ that,” commanded Sam. “Ridicule won’t convince grandfayther’s old school. This is what *I* do wi’ that, grandfayther. Our Saviour didn’t say *how* poor the poor would have to be. Mr. Turton, the grocer, is poor compared wi’ Mr. Aldridge, of the Miners Arms; the curate is poor compared with the Vicar——”

“Aw’ll be bound!” cried Ned.

“The Vicar is poor compared wi’ Mr. Brookster——”;

“Aw’ll be bounder!” shouted Ned, hitting his knee.

“Hark and luk at him!” said Nance, with moral contempt, while Sam resumed:

“So the poor i’ that way *will* always be with us; but our Saviour didn’t say tak’ twenty-five per cent. off the poor to mak’ them poorer, an’ put twenty-five in the pockets o’ the rich to mak’ the rich richer. *We* know what *He* meant.”

“My sakes!” called Ned, “aw wish *aw* did atween ’em all.”

Old Dan worked his gums, suffering defeat; and, incapable of real argument, he lifted both hands, made fists of them, brought them down on the arm of his chair, and said:

“Mesters, mesters! There’ll be mesters for men an’ minds for muscles till doomsday!”

Sam, for once, looked roused. He said:

“It’s doomsday already wi’ *us*, the way the mesters play both God an’ the devil wi’ bodies an’ souls. If the mester is so almighty wi’ his mind, and his muscles in his pocket, let him change places wi’ us for a week; let him give us his hall, and we’ll give him our cot to live in, and the pits to work in; and let’s see then. Where’d he be?”

“An’ wheer would *us*?” asked Dan with point.

“Ah,” said Sam, quite ready, “that’s t’other end of the argument, but aw’ll turn it that way on if th’ likes. Wheer would *we* be, tha asks? Wheer we are now—no coal, no wage, almost no loaf, i’ th’ end no life; so grandfayther, if actual coal-gettin’ keeps both mester an’ us; those as *gets* it—as aw’m weary o’ tellin’ thee afore now—

those as *gets* it, be it mester or man, one or one thousand; ought to be paid a wage as'll keep 'em in trim to earn their own food and mester's as well."

"Sam, lad," said Ned, "tha speaks like a cheserman! Hear, hear, to thee. Go ahead!"

Sam paid no attention to that, and continued:

"If coal was at bottom o' th' sea an' diver went down for it, whose would it be?"

Ned clapped, and Nance from a distance threateningly held up a wet half-peeled potato at him like a white shot.

"Diver's to be sure," continued Sam. "Why? Because th' sea's not bought up yet. No limited company. No water rents. No sea-water royalties. No sea-church tithes, an' th' like. Strictly speaking, though, the sea-mine coal would belong to no one or two men, but to all, an' as aw've said before, the man as *gets* should at least be paid his meat."

"An' right good meat, too!" called Ned.

"Why, grandfayther, man," resumed Sam in friendly argument, "tak' the sea-gulls we once saw at Blackpool. It's th' little dark fellow as *dives* as gets th' fish, not th' big white-wing, overseering i' th' air, wi' his claws in his pockets an' goin' to sleep on th' breeze wi' dreamin' and thinkin'. Tak' th' fish i' Green Clough brook when I wor a lad an' afore Dene Mill; 'twas th' trout as faced th' stream, an' ducked, an' jumped, an' backed, an' turned, as got th' meat—not th' fellow sleepin' in his silver an' gold, nigh a stone——"

"Ay, ay," objected Dan; "but how about th' fish the sea-gull eats; an' th' worm an' fly as trout eats! Hey?"

"An' th' trout that man eats?" supplemented Sam, to show that he clearly saw the point.

"Ay."

"That's a bigger question, grandfayther. It does seem law that one thing lives on t'other—on another—but it's quite as much law, as I read it, that everything outside o' man that *does* anything, get's fair share, and then has pleasure i' givin' to others. Why, even——"

"Bravo! Hear, hear, agen!" called Ned.

Rachel nervously listened in the direction of the door and said:

"Oh, that's enough, Sam!"

But Nance touched Rachel's foot with her clog, and gave Sam a private glance of encouragement.

"Why, e'en th' cock o' the walk stands watchin' his hens scrat meat out o' th' ground without bein'—without bein'—greedy; an' if *he* finds owt, he always clucks an' clucks for hens to share alike. As to law of feedin'—of feeding—one or t'other, if mesters would eat *us* up, 'twould be better than things as they threat to be; we would be done with—now we're only bein' 'done.'"

"Hear, hear, hear!" bawled Ned.

Nance lost control. A half-peeled wet potato splashed past Ned's ear. He only roared the more, picked up the shot, and quietly sent it on a semicircular tour to the water in the little pan-mug in front of Nance, where it caused a combination of the cyclone and water-spout; and Sam, undisturbed, continued:

"Even in Cobbett's Grammar, if I'm not mistaken i' th' rule, the verb governs th' noun; in other words, what *does* governs what *is*."

"List to that learnin'!" said Ned with the enthusiasm of ignorance. "Hear, hear! Hullo, Britton? Come in!" called Ned, as he dealt himself a most good-humoured smack on his up-lifted knee. "Come in!"

Britton, to get out of the way of Ned's physical enthusiasm, went from the doorway straight to the head of Sam's bed.

Rachel, with head down, went on knitting as if only a fly had entered—nevertheless, a fly whose buzz reminded her of sunny banks, for she coloured. Only by way of feeling her beehive of hair did she stop knitting and look up with a momentary coy welcome in her eyes.

"Tha'rt just too late to hear a tip-top wiggins'! Nea'ly almost as good as fists," said Ned.

Britton leaned over the low bed-head, nodding at Nance and twinkling his bright dark eyes at Rachel, who now had courage to freely look.

Ned continued:

"*Tha'rt* in for it, my boy! Here's a Dannel come to judgment. Fayther, here, is for lockin' thee up. He says *tha* has set all us colliers playin' an' larkin', an' it's a pity that *tha* wern't drowneded i' No. 1. He says he'd hev held thy head under hissen wi' pleasure if *he* had been down i' the flood wi' thee——"

"Oh, fayther!" protested Rachel.

"He's only teasin'," explained Nance.

"He says, *tha'rt* ruinin' the country, drivin' trade out, breckin' th' mesters' hearts, starvin' 'em, robbin' 'em, takin' the clothes off their poor childer's backs, takin' th' corn out o' the horses' mouths, and cakes out o' dogs', forcin' want in upon 'em all by the front-door an' th' back, makin' 'em tak' their boots to the brokers an' their watches to pawn to get a meal's meat."

"Good!" cried Sam, enjoying the irony.

"And *tha'rt* doin' all this, Britton. Shame! Ugh! Shame on thee, Britton Lloyd! I'll tell thy mother on thee——"

"That'll do, now," appealed Nance.

"Ay; it's enough, fayther," added Sam.

"Come and sit thee down, Britton," Nance urged; and he sat near the window-table by Rachel, who put down her knitting.

The mere change of Britton Lloyd's position was like a good move in chess: the situation was abruptly changed—nobody spoke, everybody mused; old Dan with his hand quivering on the arm of his chair like the after-vibration of a strained wire; Ned pulling at the bristly tuft of his beard as if each hair were a wire by which he was receiving the most convincing arguments straight from his brain; Sam lying down with his arms out as if on a crucifix, now looking moody, now anxious, now resolute, and now impatient with his imprisonment at a crisis which was already beginning to make men's blood stir for good and for ill.

Only the click of Rachel's needles working again spoke in the quietude, like the faint phantom voice of the engines of labour that were silent and still.

In that moment of fixed moods Britton lifted his chair nearer Rachel; yet nobody spoke, nobody moved. Rachel's eyes and cheeks were the only things affected; and the brown eyes looked sideways approvingly, while the cheeks ratified that approval by a blush the shape of her heart.

The chords of life at a crisis were upon the strain in each being in that kitchen. There was the main crisis for them all; there was the individual crisis for each.

Britton lifted his arm to Rachel's chair-back.

Unknown to her, he felt the heavy thudding of her heart through the wood ; and unknown to him she, by the same medium, felt the nervous quiver of his hot hand.

Simultaneously they looked at each other. 'Twas but a look, and yet, simultaneously, their hands met. Britton, by a sustained pressure of his fingers, implied, "*Never mind, Rachel, lass.*" And through a replying pressure of hers she said, "*I understand, lad ; we mun fight it wi' th' rest.*"

"Doctor, mother," whispered Sam ; and the busy club doctor was over the doorstep and at the bedside before musing Nance could find her feet.

Ned gave forth a portending cynical whistle.

Nance looked at Ned to demand good manners in the presence of his superiors ; but Ned supplemented his whistle by saying aloud above his superior's rapid questions to Sam :

"No, no, Dr. Howdenbrook ! Tha dunna mean it ? Tha'rt not goin' to tick him off club-list ? "

The doctor did not answer, and was examining Sam's back by a series of vigorous movements.

"How dost ta find him, doctor ? " asked Nance, hardly knowing what to wish, what to think.

"Better—much better ; practically well. He should get up now ; 'twould do him good.

Ned repeated his whistle, but with a most cynical rise into a higher register, and a most ironical drop of an octave which in turn seemed to drop into the musicless depths of his indignation—and the doctor had gone.

Next day one of the club officers called and informed Sam that after that week the sick-club money would cease.

Sam and his mother were alone. He shook his head with the silent bearing of a possible wrong.

"Never mind, mother," he said, with forced courage, as the sick-club officer left. "Never mind. Bring down my clothes, and I'll see how I shape. Doctor may know more about my back nor I do."

The clothes were brought, and Sam dressed himself. His mother was in the back-kitchen, and he rehearsed a walk to the window-table ; but it was a weak performance. Moreover, he could not stand erect ; he stooped from the shoulders.

"Lors a' mercy, Sammy, lad ! " said Nance, entering ;

“but thee’s wasted sin’ thy clothes measured thee afore! Thick beddin’s a mak’-believe! Tha mun exercise an’ feed up a bit. Maybe Dr. Howdenbrook’s right. Tha mun try. Let’s see thee step to th’ door. Ay, lad, try. Can’t thee hold up i’ th’ old straight shape? Try, Steady!”

There was such a changed shape about the poor fellow that before he reached the door Nance’s eyes filled. She swiftly blotted them on her apron, and called:

“Well done, lad! well done! Not so bad for th’ first. It mak’s me think on thee a babe at thy first toddle. Tha mun try, an’ try, Sam. Tha’rt better comin’ back nor goin’. Hey, my conscience, but thy clothes tell a tale. Aw mun get thee a bottle o’ cod-oil to gi’e thee someut to carry thy jacket on. Sit thee down, son, an’ rest;” and Nance jerked into position for him her own low rocking-chair.

“Sittin’ is near as strange as walkin’, maybe, at first, lad. But tha mun practise at both every day, and get thy strength up. Ah, hark ye! If those ears o’ mine know knock from knock, it’s Miss Waide. Ay, aw thought so, miss. Come in. Tha mun well look at bed, as if it wor a last year’s nest. Faer’s th’ bird, perched on his mother’s cheer; an’ he looks as if he’s bin moultin’ flesh from under his feathers, poor lad.”

Grace went forward, fervently saying:

“I am so glad to see you up—Sam.”

“Hear at that, now!” exclaimed Nance to help Sam to a profounder comprehension of an exceptional compliment.

But, Sam, quiet, reflective, touched at that moment even to pain with the inner play of emotions by thought, word, and deed, which even his own sympathetic little mother knew nothing of, required no such aid.

Nay, to Sam himself, it seemed as if the very kindest act would have been to dull a quivering susceptibility that was too ready to receive tender impressions—impressions that were doomed not to be still-born, but to live on in that secret world of feelings, where, instead of tears falling outwardly from the eyes, they drop inwardly from the heart.

The word “Sam” sang in the fellow to the tune of Grace’s tone, as if that were the first time he had ever heard the name; and to the picture of her face, as if that

were the first time he had ever seen a creature's lips open and close upon the familiar word "Sam."

If one of the visiting sunbeams had said it, he could not have been more impressed by the mystery of such an apparent impossibility in ethereal friendship. It filled him with wishes, pained him with a yearning to exist where all life could be in harmony with that superior sound, and yet where that sweet sound would cease to be superior because he would be its equal.

"Hear at that!" repeated delighted Nance. "Tak' gran'fayther's cheer, Miss Grace, and then tha can hear an' see each other i' comfort. They're all out—gran'fayther gone to towpath to meet his nephew's *Polly Ann* canal boat fro' Leeds, as usual o' Thursdays; th' fayther is propin' up a wall wi' talk somewhere, and Rachel's gone a-lanein' an' a-lonein' wi' Britton Lloyd; for bless tha heart, miss, sin' strike begun, ev'ry day's a Sunday wi' them two. Ay, all out but us, Miss Waide, so for once we can put our wits together i' peace, an' not i' pieces, as when my man an' his owd fayther's here, both on 'em as much off the straight as a branch from a trunk. But these are goin' to be times, miss. It aminds me of, 'Enough is the day for th' evil thereof.'"

"Enough is the *evil* for the *day* thereof, mother," said Sam.

"Tha puts evil first, and aw put day. Well, aw think tha'rt right, Sam, for evil's first; it starts o'er-night to be ready for mornin', i' these strike times. Aw'm fair scared to think too much, miss. Does Mester Brookster say owt about it to thy fayther, Miss Grace, if aw may so ask?"

Grace said: "I fear not."

"Or does young Mester Brookster say owt to *thee*?"

Grace shook her head, and turned a little away.

"Aw do wish someut could be done betwix' mesters an' men afore they feight each other i'to fits o' temper, and then begin lovin' each other—when th' starvin' mischief's done; for, judgin' by Sam and his fayther, th' men are as all-round firm on their own idea as th' crust on a hard-baked loaf. An' to start wi' a knock-down blow, Miss Waide, th' sick club's struck Sam here off list; an', if tha please, that has this meanin' to me—seven shillin' odd clean out o' my hand."

"But," said Sam, "theer's—there is Federation pay for both fayther—fayther an' me."

"Ay, if pay lasts, lad. Strike mun go on, but will funds? Will funds, Sam, lad?—hey, Miss Grace?"

Grace did not know quite enough of Federation details to answer; but if funds did cease, she knew what she would do, for at least the Ockleshaw household, and she simply said:

"Oh, help will come—help will come, Mrs. Ockleshaw."

"A course it will!" responded Nance. "Aw niver see a sparrow peck a crumb off th' ground but what aw think o' th' bird's ignorance of Scripture, 'The Lord will provide,' an' yet comin' to know it more practical nor we do, through a bit o' white crumb on th' street. Help? Aw know th' Lord better mysen nor to doubt Him i' this partic'lar case when aw believe that aw heerd Sam say to Ebenezer preacher as called—tha mus'na think as tha'rt not every bit as welcome, Miss Grace—that it 'ud be strange, if Scripture is true, the Lord would desert them as is fightin' His own fight of right agen might; worn't it that, Sam?"

Sam nodded, ashamed.

"Hey, but tha mun excuse me—aw'm forgettin' dough! As gran'fayther isna here, aw mun hev it to bakehouse mysen," said Nance, lifting the white bag from near the fireplace, "so aw'll leave thee, which aminds me straight o' Gospel, Sam, if Miss Waide will excuse th' familiar application on it, for aw'll give it as honest as it comes——"

"By all means," said Miss Waide.

"Ay, what is it, mother?" followed Sam.

"Well, lad—'My Grace is sufficient for thee,'" and she went off with her dough.

Sam frowned.

Grace tittered with surprised delight over the reckless sincerity of the little woman.

Sam suddenly coloured like an old-fashioned red dahlia, and hung his head as heavily from the stalk.

Then at a bound the humour struck him. He laughed.

Grace still tittered. Nay, she laughed.

They could not speak for laughing.

They could not look up for laughing.

A joyous shame held them in its exquisite sway.

Tears of keen human love for humanity swelled to

Grace's eyes. Quite frankly she sought her handkerchief ; quite frankly she pressed her eyes into it, and then said from its folds :

" I do love your little mother—the sincere, honest, dear little soul ! "

" It's very good of you," ventured Sam, as his laughter suddenly fell and his eyes stared at his pale, bed-nursed hand on the arm of the chair—" very good."

" So lovingly—*true!*" said Grace, still from her handkerchief.

Sam glanced her way with a pathetic look of adoration. He tightly sucked in his lips—in pleasure, in pain ; his dark-blue eyes looked like violets from which a gust has blown the rain-drops, and left the purple wet, the brighter to mirror the sun.

He looked down at his hand again, and very carefully selecting his words, and very cautious with his pronunciation, he said, in the laconic way peculiar to Sam's moody sort, who think that the outsider knows the other half of only a half-expressed idea :

" If there were more like you, there would be less like us."

Grace was touched. To make the differences between them less pronounced, she said, a little in his own manner, though it was more in the manner of a Quakeress :

" Tha mean there would be fewer differences, Sam ? "

That pained Sam. He preferred to climb up to her, away in the serene heights of perfection, rather than that she should come down to his imperfection, even in her friendly effort to make him at ease. He almost told her so.

But he sat afraid to speak—afraid to speak in her way, and yet much more afraid of hearing her again speak in his.

Grace felt that it had been a failure, and, to get back, she asked in her own old way :

" How do you mean ? "

" In life—in living. In being the best we were intended to be. If there were more like you, Miss Waide, more as would think for themselves, there would be less of the sort that aw suppose aw'm classed with. But our sort want chances to be as good as others. Understand me, miss : I'm not after money as money, or we would be no better than those who in my opinion sin agen us, for it ;

but money means food, furniture, clothes; and these mean comfort; and comfort means better conditions of body and mind; and body and mind means morals. I've thought, and thought, and *thought*—and always come back to that."

"This attempt to reduce is a great wrong. I know it is. I'm ashamed——"

"Does your father think so, Miss Waide? I'm not wishing to pry, but if he did 'twould be a good thing for us—he could speak out to the masters. You read the Litany, Miss Waide, and the collects—nay, the very first prayers i' th' Prayer-book—and see for yourself what I mean. Why, some on 'em might have been written to put in the mouths of the masters over this very trick of theirs at the pits. Talk about the devices and desires of their own hearts, and turning away from their wickedness, and not dissembling nor cloaking before the face of Almighty God! Ah, don't think as I am preachin' at *you*, miss. No, no. It's only that I'm glad to have someone as I can talk with and can be understood *right through*. Poor old grandfayther is old i' more ways nor one; fayther is younger, but not young enough to quite understand without going off into heats of hating; he thinks when I speak agenst masters I *am* agenst 'em; but I'm only agenst their principles—as for them themselves, I pity them i' th' darkness o' true life. I only want them to see as *we* see, for if they did truly, they wouldn't be long coming to. Aw do wonder and wonder when *all* labour, rough an' smooth, dirty an' clean, will be understood as *one*. The Almighty makes no difference, I'm sure. He's the biggest employer of labour, an' He gives all on us th' earth, sunshine and rain, in fair proportions for different work, I'm sure; only th' fallen angels step in between. An' I'm well sure o' this, 'tis as good in His sight to have a sewer cleaned if it means good health, as to have a carpet made if it means comfort, or a chair made if it means earned rest. Th' head doesn't go about without th' body, or body without th' head; and the work of each i' th' world is part of t'other. The misunderstandin' of this is awful, Miss Waide! It curdles my blood when aw think o' th' thousands upon thousands of little homes like my own made miserable or happy accordin' to the quantity of justice or injustice in one

man's heart. Think on it as you like, miss—it's hard, it's cruel, it's wrong——”

“ It is—it is. I *have* thought—I'm pained—I'm grieved—I shall try and do something—I'll speak—I'll go home and do so now,” she said, rising. “ Be brave ; have faith ; don't grieve,” she continued, with a suppressed impulse to put her hand on his shoulder.

He looked up as gratefully as if he knew her wish. He caught something of the expression in her sweetly animated, eager face ; and she smiled “ Good-day ” and was gone.

He rose, and with the picture of her face vividly in his eyes, he, of set purpose, looked in the little kitchen mirror at his own.

He abruptly moaned, shocked by his shaggy young beard, his rough, commonplace look compared with the superfine distinction of hers.

He gripped a chair and hung down his head. He still saw her face, and still saw his own. He trembled with a confined and unexpressed passion for a far-off, unreach-able ideal in life, in love, in the many, in one. He him- self seemed unmoved, but his heart throbbled deep in its inwardly sobbing depths ; he wiped a cold sweat from off his brow, and went and buried his face in the bed.

* * * * *

Grace, after all, did not speak to her father ; but late that night, when all was quiet, her touched feelings moved her to write :

God gave a wondrous gift to man,
Yea, stored it in the Earth and Time,
Ere man on Earth, in Time, began
His planet-course to climb.

That gift gives man the power to will
New forces over land and sea,
To win from water breath to thrill
The whirling wheels of witchery ;

It lends to all primordial force—
The native strength of Deity—
For all to will a human course
Towards Divinity.

Yet some, in greed, have made a curse
 Of that embedded gift of God :
 To them the Earth is but a purse
 Wherein their burrowing brethren plod

To dig the gift that's sold for gold
 Wherewith to gild Life's sacred span—
 All heedless of the Christ they've sold
 In master and in man.

CHAPTER XX

IN BROOKSTER'S YARD

"OH, but aw do wish this fight wor o'er!" called tall and thin Mrs. Booth, whose bend of weakness gave her the look of a pin bent with too much pressure, as she and Nance Ockleshaw caught sight of each other on their doorsteps.

"Aw saw that wish afore strike began—my conscience, aw mus'na let our Sam hear me call it strike, or he'll have me up afore Federashun i' th' name of lock-out—hey, Sam? Oh, ay, aw seed that wish *then*, Mrs. Booth, woman, but it wor wastin' wishin' to think on it; an' it's wastin' good wishin' to think on it now, seein' as we're not haife through th' feight, for mesters are determined, yet men are determinder, an' th' women are more determinder still, for, as our Sam wor sayin', it's a woman's question——"

"An' poor childer's question too! For mine, at least. That's why aw wish it wor o'er. *Thä'rt* gettin' two men's Federashun money; aw'm *not*, nor owt from anywheer but pawn; an' it's like as if pawn's eatin' up th' best things o' th' house an' off our backs. My man wor out o' benefit," she explained for the twentieth time, "an' by no fault of his own, for he didna earn it to pay rent and meat lately, to say nowt of owt else. It's tellin' on *us* above a bit. Aw'm beginnin' to wish the poor bairns could sleep through it all. Aw'm fair afraid to see 'em wakeh i' th' mornin's, for aw know it means a day on it."

"But tha wouldna have men go in!" said Nance. "If

tha couldna mak' ends meet afore, how could tha with twenty-five off? It's no use jumpin' out o' bad i' to worse! We mun manage among oursens *somehow*. Aw'd sooner live on the blisters of door-paint nor give in! Brookster's Yard isn't everything an' everywher. Look at Beckerton—women by the thousand on short allowance, and some on no allowance at all, bearing up as if fightin' were feedin'. Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Booth, aw would'na knuckle-under at mesters' notion o' things, if aw had to wait for my finger-nails to grow to feed on 'em. No, no; an' if owd Brookster or young Brookster or *any* Brookster, except the youngest miss, came this way, aw'd soon ask 'em, as our Sam asks, if at time o' creation Beckerton coal-seams—an' Beckerton souls an' bodies—wor ticketed 'Brooksters', 'Brooksters', 'Brooksters', 'Brooksters' at any price.' An' yet, as our Sam wor sayin' last neight, they come along i' these years o' grace, which Sam calls years of disgrace, and tak' th' coal by the million on million ton, an' pay neether God nor man—properly; but as 'our Ned said, they pay theirsens like the very—— tha knows who. Hullo, Sally! What hasta thee? A turnip? Theer now, Mrs. Booth; tak' it in; don't let Sally an' t'others be eatin' it raw; aw'll bring thee a knuckle o' mutton bone as wor given to me by someone aw needen name. It has good meat on, and wi' a tatur or two aw'll give thee, it'll mak' a stew for th' bairns an' thysen. Bless thee, woman, tha mus'na *think* o' wishin'. We women will manage betwixt us *somehow*, if we go scrattin' like th' hens theer. It shall ne'er be said at the finish that Brookster's Yard wor a Brookster's inch in the way of a budge."

Another pale and damaged-looking, middle-aged woman, with black hair long since streaked with gray, came to a doorway beyond Mrs. Booth's. Hers was no recent strife. It seemed prehistoric compared with Mrs. Booth's and Nance's. Her severely sinewed face, gray hair, and wearied eyes, told of years of mental strain at home, while her knotty-knuckled hands and her bony ankles above her slack clogs spoke of years of physical toil with insufficient food on pit-banks.

The creature had come to the door for a little closer companionship with Nance's voice, which she could hear.

Nance welcomed her by calling:

"Aw'm givin' Mrs. Booth here a riggin', Sarah Ann! How's Benjamin?"

Mrs. Arkwright, otherwise Sarah Ann, shook her head. It said: "Badly, badly—oh, badly!"

Nance nodded her head, and that said: "Poor lad! sorry, sorry—oh, sorry!"

Mrs. Arkwright lifted her clean, coarse flax apron to her mouth to keep it firm, while her sunken, dark eyes looked away over the narrow black valley of idle works and pits to a hilly field of golden wheat on Greigson's farm.

The clicking, rattling ring of the reaper could be heard as the heads of two horses appeared on the brow and developed into a perfect team, tugging more and more into view.

It was a most beautiful sight, with long slanting beams linking the horses, as it were, to the sun; and yet Nance said:

"Ay, ay; it's allus a poor harvest for us, Sarah Ann, when we can see yon field as clear as we've seed it o' late, an' a low wage sign for us wives when skies show blue i' th' canal, like yon. It means pits an' works holdin' theer breath; an' our men's hands i' their pockets; an' ours out. It's a pity smoke is more consolation nor bare sunshine, an' we've had enough straight sunshine these eight weeks back as mak's us collier folk pray for smoke like farmers pray for rain; an' seein' 'em cuttin' yon field so clear aminds me o' the grocer's almanac harvest picture on th' wall o' th' house when tha hasna bread i' the cupboard. But smoke will come some day! We mun cheer up, though the sun is shinin', and though canal is as blue clear as a willy plate, wi' bridge, an' birds, an' all. . . . Aw'll come in an' see Benjamin when aw've gotten Mrs. Booth someut aw've promised."

"Do," said Sarah Ann. "He's lonesome sin' Aunt Ralston left."

Nance went into her own house, and soon came out again. With her right hand she passed in her contribution towards the Booths' dinner, and with her left hand under her apron she went forward to Mrs. Arkwright's door. Signalling with her thumb up the narrow stairs, she whispered:

"Is he awek?"

Mrs. Arkwright nodded from a distance, and, catching sight of Nance's apron over her hand, needlessly stooped to put the straight patchwork hearthrug still more straight.

Nance, tilted upon the most worn wooden edge of her clogs, quietly stalked towards Mrs. Arkwright, and whispered, as if the Angel of Kindness herself should not hear :

"On'y like a thimmelful o' last year's curran' jelly Sarah Ann ; it may tempt him to a bit o' tastin'."

Sarah Ann shook her head in doubt.

"Aw'll *try*," answered Nance, and went on the softest edge of her clogs and the very tenderest edge of her feelings upstairs.

At the room door she bit her lip for nerve, and entered, saying to the wasted form that was doubled up like a partly-closed portmanteau on the narrow plank-bed :

"Well, Benjamin, all th' lads are still like thee—doin' nowt ; an' no sign o' givin' in."

A plaintive, thin voice answered with effort. It was muffled owing to the unseen face being bent almost upon the knees, on which two fists, like two low pillars, supported the brow.

"There's sign, though, o' givin' in—here ; at . . . last . . . Nance, girl."

Quite as a matter of course, because of necessity and custom, Nance put her hand to the white brow and lifted the face like a lid, so that the clear, brilliant blue eyes could see her ; and there she had to hold up the face, while the eager eyes looked up and down her, as if on holiday, until the parched lips gave the sign that the head was tired.

"Aw've brought thee a taste o' someut——"

His white, thin hand worked rapidly, like the **fin of a fish**, meaning that he couldn't—he really couldn't.

"On'y a bit, Benjamin, love—*aw'll* help thee wi' th' spoon ; it's here all riddy," said Nance, as she took about as much jelly as would stand on a sixpence from her little pot ; "It's for thirst, not for food, if that's what tha'rt fear'd on ; an' it'll do *me* good as well as thysen. Come, love !"

Nance put her hand under his brow as a test of his willingness. He did not resist, so she again lifted the face, the parched lips opened, Nance fed them, lowered the face,

and very tenderly patted the back of the bent head with its overgrown brown hair, as she said :

"That'll ease parchin', aw know. . . . Aw'll not trouble thee agen, Benjamin, 'less tha asks wi' thy hand, for aw know tha likes ease more nor meat."

"How's son Sam?"

"Eh—our Sam? Oh terrible bad—terrible, most terrible!" said Nance, afraid that the Almighty might take her at her word; and she turned her eyes up to the ceiling until they were nearly all white, with a yearning prayer for the forgiveness of that sin of consoling exaggeration.

"What's yon rattlin' aw hear ev'ry now an' agen?"

"Reapin'-machine, Benjamin, love. It's on brow field."

"It'll be eleven year to-morrow, Nance, sin' aw saw yon field," he said, with the effort of pressure and scant breath; "an' aw saw it . . . aw saw it be harvest moonlight from th' stretcher Ned and t'others carried me on from Camel Hump . . . Low moon wor playing hide-an'-seek among the sheaves . . . as you an' me, Nance, ha' played in 'em time an' time when we wor bairns."

"Ay, ay—many an' many a time——"

"Tha 'wor my sweetheart i' those days," he said, with the frankness of one to whom the end of life made all things innocent and all things sacred.

"Ay! An' aw'm thy sweetheart i' these, lad, and wi' more sensible love nor i' those days. . . . But tha mun rest; aw know tha'll hev to pay i' pain for this."

"Nay . . . aw'm not fagged yet. . . . An' aw feel as if the next rest will be for good . . . for aw'm not for long, Nance . . . aw'm not for long."

"Now, Benjamin—now, now! Though tha *art* o' th' tribe o' th' Bible, it's not for thee to prophesy. Though it's not for a Nance Ockleshaw to stand betwix' a sufferer an' release."

Benjamin feebly said :

"There's reaper agen. Doesta remember pickin' poppies?"

"Ay; an' as far back in childhood as daisies, Benjie. Like thee, lad, aw'm niver too owd to be young. But aw mus'na trouble thee."

"But dunna go, Nance. . . . Look what colour th' reaper horses be."

"Aw will, lad." Standing at the little window, Nance reported: "Jet black."

"Aw pictured white. Any pigeons flying i' the' rear o' the' sheaves?"

"They *may* be pigeons, lad; e'en doves, i' this shiney light. Arta picturin' doves? But, if my poor eyes dunna misserve me, they're crows. But yon's bonny! Tha can't tell which is sun an' which is trees, theer's such a dazlin' dash o' gold on 'em through a break o' cloud."

"Birch an' oaks," muttered Benjamin. "Doesta remember th' nuts?"

"Aw should think aw do! We were squerrels i' those days . . . an' someut o' th' monkey, too, th' way we used to climb," said Nance, coming from the window.

"Ay, ay . . . aw should hev liked to stay to see lock-out o'er. . . . Thank thee, Nance, for all tha's done . . . an' thank Vicar's lass."

"Tha'll see it o'er," she answered to him; and then to herself: "Tha'll see it o'er from a better place nor this, Benjie."

"Nance Ockleshaw, tha'rt wanted at home," called Mrs. Arkwright up the stairs.

Nance patted the back of Benjamin's hand.

"Nay, as i' th' young days, Nance!" he appealed. "Aw'm a lad. . . a bairn. . . ."

"I' spirit," muttered Nance, and lifted the face. His clear blue eyes looked back years into hers. His lips formed—she kissed his cheek—murmured something unutterable—went downstairs—and over the kitchen-table she cried truly like a child; and Mrs. Arkwright understood why.

* * * * *

Nance had left her own kitchen with only Sam in it, but she found old Dan, Ned, and Sam—in bed—rather disconcertedly trying to entertain Mr. Rew, the curate, who had arrived with a gallon milk-can of broth that was firm in a cold jelly, and a market basket of very practical-looking cold meat, bread, and a small oval dish of rice-pudding with the name "S A M" printed in the black mosaics of currants, evidently embedded there when the milk and the rice were in a half-molten state.

"Miss Waide has sent me up with these," said Mr.

Rew, "for you to deal them out as you think best, Mrs. Ockleshaw."

"Hey, but her has a eye in her heart, has Miss Grace! Thank her; an' thank her kindly, from all o' Brookster's Yard, for all on 'em mun have a share an' share alike of Miss Grace's good feelin's i' the shape o' meat. What's that? S—A—M: our Sam's name fitted up i' currans? Hey, Mr. Rew. Mr. Rew! Tha needna tell me her own fingers did that. Aw know it. It's like her. It's as like her as if her own name wor writ i' puddin'-spice beneath. Aw can see her do it; aw can see her eyes followin' her fingers wi' those smiles of hers. An' hers not done it i' th' common alphabit, but i' th' plain an' ornamental, like hersen, sweet soul. Sam, lad!" cried Nance, lifting the oval dish and holding it up like a picture, "see at thysen on th' puddin'!"

"Ay, but don't hold me upside down, mother."

Ned and Mr. Rew laughed. Old Dan did not laugh. He stood too absorbed in respect for Mr. Rew.

"Oh, aw beg thee and Miss Grace's pardon. We mun hev everythin' right side up i' connection wi' her an' thee, Sam; for aw tell thee, Mr. Rew, there's no two better hearts an' straighter consciences i' all Beckerton-'yond-Brow than the one as curran'd yon name an' the one as owns it."

"Now, mother—*mother!*" called Sam, with warmth in proportion to his shame.

"It's truth, lad; and isn't it truth as Mr. Rew believes in? Truth in all things, aw mean."

"Certainly," answered Mr. Rew heartily.

"There, now. Aw tow'd thee so. An' aw'm well sure o' this truth, Mr. Rew—that if the same finger an' thumb as prented this here name o' Sam's prented thy name, tha wouldna be ashamed to be glad, wouldsta?"

"N—o, certainly not, Mrs. Ockleshaw. Eh—certainly not. I would take it as a great compliment."

"Hear that, Sam?"

Sam writhed in the bed-clothes.

"On'y i' thy case, Mr. Rew," continued Nance—"i' thy case th' compliment would be bigger: 'twould be prented i' raisons, aw'm sure."

"Nonsense, mother—*nonsense!*" appealed Sam. "Do have a little consideration——"

"It's just because aw hev a good deal o' consideration as aw say what aw do. It's truth, an' Mr. Rew likes truth, and more so truth i' connection wi' th' quarter as he's comed from" (Mr. Rew's dark eyes here looked as if they were following a mental plan of the easiest backward way to the front-door); "so thank her kindly, Mr. Rew."

"Ay, do so, sir!" said Ned warmly.

"Dan?" called Nance. "Hast *tha* no word o' thanks? an' hasta nowheer to hang thy cap but on thy head? Off wi' it! Ay, that's more like respect. Aw thowt tha'd forgotten'd it. He's a bit hard deaf, Mr. Rew, so tha'll excuse him."

"Certainly—certainly."

"An' now, Sam—Mr. Rew's goin'—wheer's *thy* thanks? Down i' th' bed, lad?"

"Oh, *I* understand," said Mr. Rew, backing to the door.

"Ay, but that's not like our Sam—he's so hard on us lately on manners; but tha understan's; tha mun give good Miss Waide the love an' thanks of all on us. If her don't hear th' hum o' Brookster's Yard folk about her ear this day, it wonna be Brookster's Yard's fault."

He laughed, "Good-day—good-day."

"Good-day to *thee*, sir," she called after him; "an' Lord Almighty bless thee for a bit o' work to-day, as is more Christian than aw believe tha tak's credit for. Aw'm forgettin', Mr. Rew. A minute."

He returned to the door. She gesticulated that Benjamin was fast failing, and by her most appealing signs she urged him to go and see poor Mrs. Arkwright. As Mr. Rew went, she said:

"Hey, but, Ned, did tha iver see such a consolation face to set sad eyes upon? It fair mak's me glad to be i' want a bit, to feed th' sight upon a picture of a face like yon." (Sam was as still as if asleep.) "Aw can just fancy him an' Miss Waide framing together, well. But this here *is* broth—her's put some calves-foot i' this to have it this firm. But *aw* can't forget rice-puddin'. Sam lad, tha might hev said somethin'. An' fancy Mr. Rew bringin' 'em up in his own hands!"

"He couldna bring 'em up i' som'b'dy else's," said Ned.

"Now, maybe," put in old Dan, as he took his seat, "now, maybe, tha'll understand a bit o' my argiments, Ned. Aw knew tha'd hev to eat thy words some day."

"Why? How, owd man? Are they i' th' broth?"

"If so, they're fine an' good," exclaimed Nance, with a teaspoon already in her hand, her lips and tongue making the most of the after-flavour of a trial spoonful, while her eyes fixed on Ned with such an appetising smile that his eyes followed his thought from Nance's lips to the can. "It's many an' many a day sin' my lips seemed so fond o' each other as to stick like a envelope. Taste *that*, now, Ned!"—and Ned opened a harbour that was out of all reasonable proportion with the entering little craft and its freight. He made the most of the dissolving jelly with a reporting smack of the tongue, and remarked, as if in private communion with his palate:

"By golly! But tha tasted straight to th' bullock i' yon!"

"Now, gran'fayther!" called Nance, "here's a spoonfu' o' *thy* argument, as tha calls it. . . . An', Sam, tha mun hev a try-taste o' Miss Grace's goodness, for tha'rt a judge o' most things both for body and mind. . . . Here tha art, lad . . . turn thee round . . . *Sam*——"

"No; aw'll taste at th' proper time."

"Then taste tha own pudding, then——"

"Leave me be—mother."

"Oh, oh! oh, oh! Tha'rt vexed? Aw said too much to Mr. Rew? But, Sam, lad, i' th' way o' thanks it's better to say too much nor too little; an' tha'll come to my way o' thinkin' when a meal o' this vittal is i' thy vitals. Tha's no real need to be vexed, son. Aw'm helpin' thee wi' *thy* view o' the lock-out; tha *might* help me with *my* view o' the vittals, for aw tell thee that it'll come to be a question o' that i' th' end, as it wor that as started the beginnin'. Tha may think tha can feed on thy mind. Tha can, but mind must first feed on thee. . . . Now, Sam, turn o'er this way and taste o' Miss Grace's real right sort o' godly love; as for mysen, aw niver felt more o' the true fellowship at a love-feast, or more sacred wi' th' true spirit of Christianness even at our Lord's Supper. It's fact, Ned! Tha needn' snigger to thysen an' Satan, who is always a near neighbour to thy grins. . . . That's right, Sam. Turn o'er." (Sam's face was pale and drawn-in, as if by the suction of violent thoughts.) "Taste that, now. Sammy, son, arn't ta well? . . . Tha's more nor merely vexed, sure-ly. Well,

aw'll say no more if tha'd rayther me not. But yon jelly *is* good, isn't it ? ”

He nodded, and turned over to the wall again ; and Nance moodily began to put her new stores away.

“ Ay ! ” muttered poor old Dan, not only still in the ignorance of his crude past, but in the yet cruder dotage of his many years. “ Ay ! ” he repeated, with a pitiable belief in the old tragedy of his own active life which had helped to make Mr. Brookster's father and Mr. Brookster so wealthy, and left himself so very poor that only the charity of his kith and kin kept him from the poorhouse. “ If there hadna a-bin som'b'dy better off nor *thee*, Ned, how would tha hev hed this basket an' can o' meat as doesna *belong* to thee, *given* to thee ? Hey ? Answer that. Hey ? That's a fixer for thee ! Aw thowt it 'ud do for thee. Hey ? ”

“ Oh, fayther, hush wi' that,” said Ned, “ it's talk for a-child born at the back o' last centsbury.”

“ It's talk tha canna answer i' *this*,” answered the old man. “ Some o' thy talkin' sort, Ned, lad, like things as they are : they like strikes so as they mun live on charity.”

“ Ding an' dang it all, fayther ! dunna th' mesters, who hev nowt but what miner earns for 'em by gettin' coal, dunna the mesters live on charity ? ”

“ Of course they do,” confirmed Sam, “ of course they do, only on a bigger scale.”

“ If *tha* had bin paid properly,” resumed Ned, “ if *aw* had bin paid properly, we could hev *bought* this. Aw tell thee once more for the thousand an' one time, collier doesna want charity, an' he doesna want workhouse ; he wants fair and square wage—an' aw for one will see as he gets it, or by God——”

“ Now, fayther, stop that ! ” called Sam, springing up into a sitting attitude in bed. “ None o' that. It's no talk for these times.”

“ No,” said Nance, “ for aw notice lately that when tha fayther speaks o' God, he speaks by th' rule o' conterary, and thinks his fill o' the devil.”

* * * * *

Next morning the front of the line of cottages in Brookster's Yard was like a patchwork quilt, for all the varied-coloured bedroom and kitchen blinds were down. Ben Arkwright was dead.

CHAPTER XXI

FATHER AND SON

Now, to those behind the scenes who knew one special aspect of the attitude of Capital in this struggle with Labour, namely, that aspect in which the capitalist affected to be grieved over the crisis because he personally was on the verge of ruin, because trade was being stopped, because the business of the country was being injured, and because, forsooth, the poor, ignorant, misled collier was doing himself vital harm—to those who knew this well performed part played by that tragedian in real life, the proprietor, the secret gloatings of Mr. Brookster over this extremely promising crisis in human affairs seemed related to the sly gloating of some false angel in heaven in league with the devil to increase the number of the damned.

This is no exaggeration. Mr. Brookster's own wife and daughters did not know this inner aspect. In fact, very few knew it from Mr. Brookster's attitude, he posed so well as the injured and indignant man. Even though Mr. Harry was a partner in the firm of Messrs. Brookster, Son & Co., he was by no means a partner in the most private ruminating motives of his father.

Mr. Brookster had at least that negative moral caution. If Harry put this and that together for himself from the tendency of things, then Harry could. They would, of course, be so much the more in harmony; but to tell Harry to rejoice over the strike, Mr. Brookster really couldn't.

Harry did put this and that together. He knew affairs at the office; he divined his father's ideas. He divined those ideas remarkably well, because, a little modified, they were precisely the same as his own; and, lo, both father and son heard each other assume to third parties an absolutely false attitude on the crisis; they heard each other deliberately lie; they heard each other's voices put on the false ring of forced indignation with the situation as a whole, and the men in particular; and yet, apparently, they were not ashamed of themselves, or of each other, either in public or private, and were actually believed by their sympathizing friends.

Events were just as Mr. Brookster wanted them ; prices were already up, and his current gas contracts were suspended by his strike clauses. All that he desired further was that the men out would keep out ; and that Durham, Scotland, and South Wales would remain in to keep the market moving, but only moving enough to cause famine-prices to reign ; then he would sell, but not a ton before—not a ton !

The strike might hurt those proprietors and merchants who were without stocks, and who had no saving clauses in their contracts ; but they must take their chance. Business was business. He was safe—so safe that, under an accumulation of feelings of gratitude to a providence that was entirely in himself, Mr. Brookster went to All Souls' Church on the following Sunday morning by carriage and pair, and verily sang and prayed.

The Vicar, he thought, preached with the most admirable discretion, avoiding the feverish question of the hour, preserving a religious neutrality upon the vexed subject of master and man by taking as his theme the far-off subject, the religious observances of the Jews. Most admirable discretion. The cutest tact. Many a vicar might have been tempted to make a fool of himself by going into a business subject he knew nothing about. Not so with Mr. Waide. By having a few shares here and there himself, he knew enough about capital to realize that capital has its natural rights, its natural power, its trade responsibilities. Ay, during the week he would have Mr. Waide up to dine.

When, however, the box came round to make a collection " for the poor of the parish " Mr. Brookster suspected something. He reflected. " For the poor of the parish ? " It sounded ominous. Nevertheless, in a complicated mood of good and evil he decided to give. But not much. This looked too much like Grace's doings. She would only devote it to the strikers ; and Mr. Brookster sidled out of the presence of Charity by slipping half a crown into the box.

The coin was hardly out of his hand when a purely diplomatic business idea occurred to him. If a little extra help would delude the men of Beckerton and Beckerton-beyond-Brow to stand out until prices did touch a good tip-top high market level, he for one would help ; it would be worth while—it would pay ; and he bowed this

holy thought in his head to receive the benediction which Mr. Waide with uplifted hands was solemnly pronouncing as follows :

“ The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, *keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God*, and of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord. And the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, be amongst you, and remain with you always. Amen.”

CHAPTER XXII

MOTHER AND DAUGHTER

ON the following Friday afternoon there was an urgent yet nervous pull at the Vicarage bell.

Grace happened to be near the door and she opened it. Dora was there. They greeted, but Dora was disappointed—defeated.

As Dora entered Grace's little parlour, with agitation she asked for Mr. Waide, and then helplessly cast herself into Grace's arms, unable to wait, unable to bear.

“ Oh, what will you think of me, my dear, dear Grace ? I've done wrong—I want your father to see my father, and have it all undone again—I'm engaged to Mr. Dawbairn, and don't want to be ! They would have it, but it is wrong—I don't like him—and I've been thinking of all that you told me. I want to be like you—to come to think like you. You are right, and we are wrong, I'm sure. Oh, Grace dear, will *you* speak to father ? Mother and Bertha are of no use. I've told them—they are shocked—they say I'm bound—honour binds me. Dear, dear Grace, save me from something so terrible that I never, never thought it could be. But they talked so, they plagued so. But I shall not ! I'll die rather than be false to Mr. Rew. Oh, Grace, Grace ! dear, dear Grace ! —I didn't think—I didn't mean—I've said too much—I'll go back—I will not see your father——”

“ Of course you will, my dear Dora——”

“ Oh, no, no ! Oh no, I've said too much—forgive me—I'll go home—I'll go home ” ; but instead of freeing herself, Dora clung the more to Grace, burying her head between Grace's elbow and waist.

"Rest—rest a little, Dora dear," said Grace, standing as a stay for the girl's emotion.

There was a sound of a brougham. Grace heard it stopping at the front-door. She looked at the window. Only the pinkish nozzle of a white horse came into view, but she knew that it was from Beckerton Old Hall. Dora was still deep in her distress, and Grace led her to sit on a couch.

Gradually the storm passed; the tears ceased; there was the quietude of a calm, and soon even a ray of sunshine in Dora's brown eyes, as she looked up with the dumb craving of a noble nature towards a yet nobler and fuller one.

They did not speak.

Grace consolingly patted Dora's hand, Dora lifted Grace's to her cheek—and there was a knock at the door.

The maid said that Grace was wanted in the drawing-room.

Dora promised to wait until she returned, and Grace went.

It was Mrs. Brookster. Her greeting of Grace was somewhat restrained, and Mr. Waide at once supported that semi-independent attitude by rather severely expressing Mrs. Brookster's very justifiable complaint that she, Grace, had been unduly influencing Dora in an affair which, after all, was exclusively a family one.

Grace turned from her father to Mrs. Brookster, and begged to have a definite charge.

Mrs. Brookster, with that quiet severity of courtesy which is more bitter than the bluntness of vulgarity, said that Grace had influenced the poor girl against Mr. Dawbairn.

Grace, with a courtesy devoid of the least bitterness, assured Mrs. Brookster that she had not, excused herself, and left the room—Mrs. Brookster and Mr. Waide thinking that that was a new way of showing a growing independence.

In a few moments Grace returned with Dora, a willing though bashful witness on behalf of the accused.

Mrs. Brookster and the Vicar looked at the accused, at the surprised witness, and then at each other, wondering what their verdict should be.

"Have I," asked Grace, addressing Dora—"have I ever

spoken to you about Mr. Dawbairn, either for or against him ? ”

“ No, dear. You have always spoken about goodness right, justice, personal honesty, and the courage to be one’s better self. More, dear Grace,” she said with a growing courage that seemed but that moment granted her—“ you have taught me to look at more than one side of life ; you have——”

Mr. Waide coughed, as he had heard others cough at depressing parts of his sermons ; and, like an aggrieved orator, Dora suddenly stopped.

Mrs. Brookster seemed to increase like an indignant peacock, but very patiently curbed her impatience, closed her feathers again, and whirled into her hand the tail of her slight train.

“ Well ? ” she said, really curious for more.

Dora could not continue. She put her arms about Grace.

“ Should *I* say it ? ” whispered Grace.

Dora’s head shook. “ No. . . . No.”

“ Well, Dora ? ” said her mother. “ Speak—I must know the rest.”

“ Perhaps,” suggested Mr. Waide, “ Dora would like to be alone with you ? ”

Dora again shook her head ; then, clinging more to Grace’s side, with her face hidden, upon one long sigh of painful but inevitable truth, she murmured, “ Mamma dear, it must be broken off. It cannot be ! I cannot marry ! ”

CHAPTER XXIII

IN THE THROES

AFFAIRS were desperate at Beckerton and Beckerton-beyond-Brow. October was yielding to the dull, clouded, misty darkness of November, even before November was due. November clouds, too, were in the men’s minds, cold November dews on some of the distracted women’s brows, and the November rain of tears was blown by chilly November gusts from many a baby’s eyes.

Winter itself was anticipated in many a wan creature

who had been too ill-fed during the past thirteen weeks to look warm even in the sun.

Moreover, there was no talk of surrender on either side—not a hint. Among the men, indeed, quite the reverse, and numbers of them settled at the street corners, as if to see the Old Year out and New Year in in the same state of mind.

And not only colliers did this. Because of the want of coal, railway-men, gas-men, iron-workers, tool makers, mill and factory hands of Beckerton and district, were out by thousands in forced idleness—all bearing it with a generosity of good feeling for the sake of the colliers that was far more like Christian brotherhood than ordinary indifferent work-a-day life.

The spirit of right was roused. The moral perception was awakened. Emotion was touched. Thought itself was quickened in those long, dreary, weary hours of idleness, when man talked earnestly to man.

This kindled perception spread like a permeating conviction. The public conscience was with the conscience of the men; the men were nobly supported by money, by kind, by personal encouragement—yes, by even an intenser and wider expression of that feeling of Christian brotherhood which lay ready in far more hearts and minds throughout the country than was dreamt of either by master or man.

And yet, though the response was nobly generous, though sympathy was practical, though both money and material were pouring in from all quarters into Beckerton and Beckerton-beyond-Brow; though the local shop-keepers were right liberally supporting those who had supported them; though ministers, lay helpers, Salvationists, and here and there earnest curates and exceptional vicars, toiled morning, noon, and night; though many pitying hands gave food at the front-door and the back, and many a man and woman gave what the public could never know; though doctors attended upon the sick and dying where fees were hopeless; though the Miners' Federation had its committee of visitors and the Central Relief Society its discriminating agencies at work; though the work-house itself was there as a last resource, and the sympathetic police themselves kept friendly watch on their patrols—all the distress could not be covered. Most of it

that was relieved could only be relieved in part. Some of it, alas, cried out almost in vain. Some of it did not cry out at all, but grimly and doggedly endured until by chance it was discovered—cornered, silent, suffering with an inactive agony of mind and body that was mysterious, pitiful, tragic, in a degree even inane, seeing that shops were still open, people were still in the streets, the churches, chapels, and Salvation Army barracks were still open, and the poor-house was still over the way.

In the poorer quarters of Beckerton you would see sitting on the doorstep of a newly-formed home the young girlish mother—bloodless, thin, with shrunken cheeks, eyes as eager as a newly-caught bird's, and her dress slack about her bust owing to her long fasts, offering her crying child a breast that was like a still more shrunken and wrinkled version of her face; you would see another mother fold a morsel of precious bread in a rag and give it to her babe to suck; or yet another divide a piece of begged bread, that was barely enough for one, between three, she, the mother, being the fourth, and going without excepting for the tribute of a bite which, perhaps, two of her children voluntarily paid.

"Only enough food to take away the feeling of clemming," "No trust," "No fund money," "Out of club," "Debt with the grocer," "Debt with the landlord," "Debt with the chemist," "Debt with the doctor"—these were the cries.

Wives were like widows, children like orphans, men in the streets like widowers, avoiding home so that they would not reduce the family share of charity soup.

The dumb endurance of the men in this and in other ways, their good temper, their self-control, their self-respect, their respect for others, were among the most appealing traits of the whole struggle.

Where was that collier of whom we hear so much—the collier and his bulldog, the collier and his greyhounds, the collier and his fighting cocks, for which he will snatch the food from his wife and children, and feed in savage loneliness on beefsteak, while they fast in fear and trembling?

He was certainly not at Beckerton or Beckerton-beyond-Brow. A warehouseman at Manchester, a clerk at Liverpool, or a mill foreman at Bradford, could not have been more human than Britton Lloyd, more affectionate than

Sam Ockleshaw, more patriotic to home than his father Ned ; and there were hundreds of Britton Lloyds, hundreds of Sam Ockleshaws, and hundreds of father Neds.

True, there were other kinds, as there are other kinds of Manchester warehousemen, Liverpool clerks, Bradford foremen—the kinds that have by various causes passed from success to failure, from failure to distress, from distress to despair, and up from despair to the fitful, dangerous energy of desperation.

There were some of this kind at Beckerton, and a few at Beckerton-beyond-Brow. But they were not all colliers. By no means. Most of them were nondescript chance labourers—at that job last week, at this this week, and at nothing next week. Some were physically weak, hangers-on at the skirts of work, pitiable in their incapacity to do the heavier toils of the day, yet capable of little else ; and some were chronic idlers, whose most prosperous time is the time of a strike—idlers who appeal with a tearful pathos which the genuine toilers in need can never approach, who are at home at a feast or a fight, and who will even attend worship in view of the consolation of a coin or a cake.

But these were exceptions. The vast majority of cases were those of the decent, regularly-working, home-proud, family-loving men, who knew what they were about, whether in work or out.

They daily gathered in groups and crowds, patrolling in twos and threes in the main street of Beckerton. Nevertheless, there was no alarm. The bank still conducted its business with open doors ; the pawnbrokers still exposed watches in their windows and forfeited goods loose at the door ; the grocers and bakers still served those who could buy or who had tickets. Even the confectioners did not cease to ornament their windows with decorative dainties ; the public-houses were not guarded, the butchers' stalls in the market were as free and open as ever, and the drapers still showed the latest in cloth to many a chilled, weary loiterer, who could have made almost as good use of clothes as of food.

Merely a sheet of glass stood between plenty and poverty, and yet honest poverty held its hands in its pockets, and fought its good fight as it began, on moral grounds.

Beckerton-beyond-Brow, owing to the scattered position

of what real shops it had, and owing to the kitchen-and-parlour-window character of minor attempts at business, looked more dejected than Beckerton proper. The men, women, and children, too, being fewer, looked more lonely, more isolated, more haggard, even thinner, as if they ate less and brooded more.

The very cocks and hens, the cats and terriers, looked as if short fare, in their case, too, made them debilitated, lethargic, moody, with a pathetic alertness only when some chance food took them by surprise in the street.

Even the little railed-off gardens in front of most of the cottages were in keeping with the personal and material dejection of the people and the place, with their wintry bareness, their beheaded cabbage-stalks, their shrivelled, flowerless Sweet William and Marigold plants, their grave-like mounds of stored potatoes for winter use, the only bright hints of life being in the tufts of parsley; while the damp deserted summer-seat by the door was like an abandoned shrine from which the spirit of the saint had gone.

A few of the children were the brightest objects in the place, looking as if they could thrive for weeks upon their own freshness. On the other hand, some were the very dullest and saddest, giving to even the tea-time slab of bread and syrup, which they with economy slowly devoured, a shadow of their gloom.

What in their innocence did they know of the fight between two men at Beckerton Old Hall and their fathers and mothers?

And yet, what did they not know in the hourly stages of one day's hunger added to another, week after week, month after month?

The Brooksters had already starved more than twenty-five per cent. of flesh off them; and yet, forsooth, some of the little innocents still went to the Vicar's Sunday-school and sang hymns of Love, and received tickets with texts on, one of the Booths' texts being, "Forasmuch as ye do it to one of these, ye do it unto Me"; and a second, "Jesus wept"; and yet a third, "Love one another."

Nevertheless, nobody in Brookster's Yard but Sam Ockleshaw seemed to have the slightest perception of the Christian irony of all this; and when, with bitter and biting indignation, he referred to it as illustrated in the case of the poor Booths next door, his blue eyes quivered

in his face with rebellious light, as if a confined flame should flicker to quit a lamp so as to go free to illuminate the dark places of the earth.

Ay, even those little children unconsciously helped by their endurance the one great cause. Indeed, the very humblest being who was clemming, either in company or alone in a shut-up cottage that was hidden in Brookster's Yard, isolated in Beckerton-beyond-Brow, which in turn was a little valley of pits shut off from the world, and having its own purely local supply of sky—the humblest creature hidden there, weary, worn, longing with the body for meat, and with the mind for succour, was not, after all, an isolated entity, but an active member of the labour party, which was doing work in that great lay Parliament of the people, which prepares the way for the official Parliament of talk, and, finally, for the practical Parliament of deed.

Each dank, deserted garden awaiting spring was an epitome of Beckerton-beyond-Brow; Beckerton-beyond-Brow, with its mills and mines stagnant, its men, women, and children awaiting the spring of events that would bring full active life again, was an epitome of the larger Beckerton; the larger Beckerton, with its more complicated trades and conditions, and its labourless thousands, was an epitome of other Beckertons that were in the same struggle that labour was making to speak and make itself heard, to act and make itself felt.

In this way, too, the scattered colliery communities were many, and yet one. Beckerton was another version of Barnsley; Barnsley another version of St. Helen's and Wigan; St. Helen's and Wigan had counterparts in the Wrexhams and Molds of North Wales; and North Wales had fighting counterparts in the mining villages of the historic shires of Gloucester and Warwick.

Ockleshaw's cottage window in Brookster's Yard was daily proof of this. Sam was the chairman of his little district branch of the Federation. He was kept informed of all the official movements, and, to secure being posted up in the unofficial movements, he, before all his money was exhausted, with financial daring sent a three months' subscription to two London papers.

The result of these two active news supplies was, as Nance described it to Grace Waide, "to turn th' bed into

a telegram post-office, th' table i'to a station paper-stall, an' kitchen-window i'to a patchwork o' print and scribble."

That was perfectly true, for if Sam received a telegram, or read an item of news or an encouraging leader in his London papers, he wrote the pith of it in blue lead on a slip of paper, and got Rachel to paste it on a window-pane, so that his comrades in their daily call for news could read the latest and pass it on.

One dull day in late October, when a drizzling mist filled the little valley in front of Brookster's Yard, and a chilly east wind splashed an occasional spot of rain on the window, and the men seeking news strolled round to Brookster's Yard with the dull, damp, dishevelled dejection of hens in the rain, Sam's announcements were :

"Cheer up, lads! Pickard's firm. He'll dig his way through."

"Wood is as good as iron."

"Wales still backs Lancashire. Lancashire still backs Yorkshire. Derbyshire, Warwickshire, and Gloucestershire back everybody else. Cheer up."

"More and more money. *Chronicle* creeping up. The *Sun* still shines. Post-order for £2 from Britton Lloyd and the singing Beckerton lads at Rhyl."

"Hurrah! Best of the public with us yet, and the best of the parsons on the track."

"Row at Heath Bank Pit; put hands down, boys, hands down—and heads up. Give Sam, yourselves, and all good colliers a cheer. Let's hear it."

Sam heard the men laugh; he heard their merry chatter break with a hearty cheer, and he answered it with a fervent cheer of thanks from the bed.

Laugh though Sam and the men did, it was nothing less than a spiritual struggle against the pangs of the famished flesh to give those cheers, for many houses were now in the grimpest grip of the crisis—the best furniture at the brokers', watches and the best clothes in pawn; the small local grocer closed with stock exhausted, credit shaken, and with outstanding debts that would stand out unpaid for months, with, in the meantime, threatening want over the once happy, prosperous little business home;—hence no food on credit for some colliers' homes from the usual source; no money except a rare copper or two in charity, or the "insurance" or club money on the chance death

of a grandfather or child; relatives poor and far off, neighbours poor and in equal distress; no chance at the Beckerton Central Relief, because "out of the district"; no courage to again go to the Methodist minister's house, he looked so pained and haggard with work, and so grieved because he had absolutely nothing more that day to give; no hope at the Vicarage unless Miss Waide was in: and she was so much out or nursing her sick; no food from anywhere unless as a result of a successful once-a-week begging of food at a villa two miles away, or the hasty stampede of one of the youngsters into the house with a turnip stolen from a passing farmer's cart; no reliable source on the right or the left; nothing but day-to-day endurance, with hourly wondering as to what the night and the morning would bring.

Half-starved pet rabbits were killed; pigeons' eggs were cooked and demolished; the pigeons themselves were sacrificed; cocks and hens were one by one reluctantly taken from their perches to keep precious life alive; the rank flesh of the crow was sought at twilight by pirating lads, and a few desperate men laid snares in secret for rabbits and hares—and sincerely praised God when they got a grip of squealing food for their children at home.

To go to Brookster's Yard was like going to see home friends after several years' foreign travel—to find that the old have aged, the healthy have been ill, and that the rich are poor.

Lean little Nance was even thinner, even smaller. The knuckles of her broad active little hands shone like the prominent joints of a bamboo cane, and her bare ivory elbow was pitiful to see. The face was as a revised map, more crowded with lines and names—the lines of new cares, the names of new woes. Her blue eyes were sunken—farther off, apparently of a lighter blue than before, because of the dark purple socket in which they were deeper set, as if receding, through troubled thought after troubled thought, even towards the brain.

And yet, forsooth—such was the higher life of the struggle—her soul verily seemed bigger than of yore, her heart braver, and her belief in Providence deeper. If the men won by holding their own, heaven be praised—she could bear anything for that.

The one-time bright, bonny, buxom Rachel, with the

brown eye browner and brighter than her glossy brown hair, was now like an apple blown to the ground at the time of ripening—checked, withered, yellow instead of ruddy, and with a hidden wound where it struck the earth ; for had the lock-out come to an end she and Britton were to have been married that autumn, ill though Sam was—nay, because Sam was still unwell, for it would be one the less taking from the little at home.

But she was unwed, and Britton Lloyd (with four other colliers) was singing his way from village to village, and farm to farm, by the coast main-road from Mostyn, Gronant, Prestatyn, Meliden, Dyserth, and Rhyl, and then inland up the Vale of Clwyd, working his way through Rhyddlan to his mother's home near Cwm.

Ned was like a severe crude wood engraving of the former portrait of himself : well-marked lines instead of shadows, black and white instead of colour, and all the features stolid, immovable—as fixed as an engraving, but with the small black eyes restlessly alive in the austere stillness of the face.

But that face was a puzzle. At one moment it looked as if it and the fist on the arm of the kitchen-chair could murder God Himself, if God were tangibly there, for allowing him, his Nance, and their flesh and blood, to suffer like that, while He at the same instant allowed Mr. Brookster to be turning his banks of both dirt and coal into gold. At another moment the same severe face, the same severe hand, but now gripping the chair, looked as if they could go to the stake and the rack for that cause for which the whole man was already enduring torments and pangs.

Poor old close-shaven Dan, long and lank, silent and still, was like a Cardinal in corduroy waiting through the final throes of tribulation for the divine call which, with a trumpet-thrill when awake, or a whisper when asleep, might call him at any hour away.

He would not have wanted much food, even if Nance's store had been full. In that respect he suffered less than any. A small dry biscuit and a sip or two of water kept life journeying nearer and nearer the inevitable close.

Sometimes Nance thought the close had indeed come, old Dan was so still, so white ; and she would pick up his fallen blue handkerchief to cast it across his knee just to get a surer view of his eyes.

One afternoon, when Nance was knitting and Sam was reading a London newspaper in bed, and old Dan was sitting in the shadowy corner between the window and the cupboard—musing, dreaming, neither in this world nor the next, but in that sphere of abstractions between the two—a meagre tear, that was itself aged-looking, oozed from one of his eyes and trickled with feeble flat flow down that side of his face which caught the early sunset lights from the window.

Nance, like a sentinel of Life keeping watch on Death, looking up to see that all was well with him, caught sight of the silvery little stream. As a roundabout way to console by disturbing him, she poked the fire, but he did not move; then she coughed, but as he still did not lift his handkerchief to his face, she said:

“Fayther?”

His gums worked, muffled by his closed lips, as if he were working his way back to the world through reverie.

“Um. Ay, ay, Liz. . . . It never did do, an’ it never will. Mesters—are mesters——”

Sam called, “Listen to this, mother,” and read: “A marriage is arranged between Alfred Dawbairn, Esq., J.P., of The Towers, Surrey, and Miss Brookster” (not Miss Dora, you see), “daughter of Peter Brookster, Esq., ex-M.P. for Beckerton.”

“Just as tha propheted, Sam. Hey, my! money, money—owt for money. If by puttin’ a King George sovrin an’ a Queen Victoria sovrin in a bag they could breed half-sovrins, them sort ’ud do it; but as they can’t, they do it by marriage—any woman an’ any man. As Brookster’s youngest *won’t*, Brookster’s eldest *will*. Fayther, man, what’s ta thinkin’ on all to thysen? Gie us a bit on it. Have a sup of wayter?”

Dan acted as if dumb. Nance leaned forward and tugged his trousers at the knee as she slowly demanded: “*What’s—ta—thinkin’—on?*”

He dreamily said: “Aw’m comin’, owd lass. . . . It never will in this world. Mesters mun be mesters.”

“What is that?” playfully called Sam.

But Nance whispered:

“Never mind him, Sam. He’s moonin’ a bit, lad.”

And old Dan muttered, as if to Nance:

“Tha’ll put me in All Souls’ earth . . . wi’ Liz?”

At that moment Ned Ockleshaw rushed in, proudly holding up a dead fowl, still bleeding, as he moved towards the back-kitchen.

But Nance, comprehending all at a glance, was at the back-kitchen door before him.

"None o' that!" she said, with fiery honesty. "None—o'—that."

"But aw will!" he said, holding the prize away.

"But tha won't!" she called, springing at it and catching the bird by a wing.

"Tha ninny!" he growled. "Look at blood, an' they're comin'!" and he tried to twist it from her again to rush to the back-kitchen.

"Ninny or Jinny; blood or no blood, there isna honest roostin' for th' bird here!"

"Out with it, fayther," called Sam, leaning over the bed. "Tha'll bring trouble. Out wi' it i'to yard, or I rise!"

Ned put so much physical energy into an oath that his grip slackened; Nance at the right instant snatched the fowl and hurled it outside.

Mrs. Booth, next door, saw its strange inanimate flight to earth, ran to it—and two policemen and a gamekeeper entering Brookster's Yard, followed by a crowd, saw her take it into her house. They went there.

Going to his door, Ned called, "Her's no hand in it. Tak' me—if tha dar'!—tha darn'd demons!" and, stepping back, he lifted a chair and held the four legs like bayonets, while he grinned at them as from behind a hand barricade.

The crowd cheered.

The two officers rushed at the hand barricade.

"Father, go!" shouted Sam, vainly trying to rise. "Go, go. Sit down, grandfather. Mates," he called to those outside, "in God's name, hands off! He must go. Come here, mother; keep from them," and Sam hastily dressed as best he could.

"Darn an' confound thee!" Ned growled, as he became overpowered, and fell heavily, and Nance screeched indefinitely for help. "Tha mun tak' th' house first! Darn thee!" roared Ned from under the chair, struggling like a snared wolf.

"Nay, darn thy poor sen, man, bringin' this trouble to us!" called Nance with trembling agitation. "Hey, what

am aw sayin' of my poor own man? Oh, in Love's Almighty name, sit thee down, grandfayther, an' don't add to it! Sit thee down. Oh, dunna *kill* him, men! Ned, tha fool, give in!"

But with a twist of his legs Ned tripped the game-keeper to the floor. Then the officers added more vigour to duty. The hooting crowd became threatening, and Sam sidled from off the bed, and drew his mother to him, and in the most passionate tones of appeal he called to the men about to rush in:

"Hold off, boys! Stand back!"

"Ned, Ned; oh Ned!" cried Nance.

Rushing and pushing through the crowd came Rachel; ignorant of everything but the fact that two policemen were struggling over her father. Passion turned red in her; and then sanity itself turned pale. She seized one officer by the back of the coat-collar with strangling tugs. The crowd cheered. Sam and Nance struggled with her, but for a few moments she did not see, hear, or feel anything but her father cursing and struggling with increased rage.

"Tha's makin' it worse an' worse, lass!" called Nance.

"He's done wrong; he must go!" cried Sam.

"He shanna!" called Rachel, with her knee bending the officer's back in while her hands tugged at his collar.

"Art ta *mad*, Rache?" cried Nance.

"Ay, mad, —fool'd—silly—crack'd—daft! Hands off my fayther, or 'twill be heads off wi' some on ye!" and she more fiercely tugged the collar.

"Oh, Sam, Sam, lad," wailed Nance, going to Rachel, "her's gone wild—her's gone simple, simple. Rachel, lass, come back to thasen!"

Rachel laughed like some wild inhabitant of some wild world of the wind, and, with a shriek, let go of the policeman's coat.

The sound reached her father. It was like a call of kin to kin. The spindles of the chair snapped; he half rose, he burst through the yielding double hold of the men, and, with a fiendish defiance that held them all off, he stood with Rachel in his arms.

"Rachel, girl," he said, "aw didna mean harm."

She laughed strangely. Nance went to her, saying, "What's come ailin' thee, dear lass? Come to thy

mother ; come to Sam ;" and Rachel changed from her father to Sam as if no change had taken place.

Sam said to the policemen :

" I'll give you my word that he will go quietly, if you'll be quiet. Try him. Father, you'll be bound to go ; we know tha meant well, but wrong's wrong. Have sense. Go ; it'll come right with us all in time."

Ned stood ready, and the men closed in.

Nance hastened to a peg for her head-shawl, and put it on.

" Tak'—that—off, little woman !" called Ned. " If aw go, aw go alone."

Nance took the shawl off, and deeply sank her face into it.

When she looked up again Ned was leaving the kitchen, saying, " Tha're takin' no thief—aw picked it up off th' road ;" and he went out to the crowd, ashamed, crushed, shutting the door between him, his old father, Nance, Rachel, and Sam.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE NEW M.P.

IN the South of England, where the seaside and market towns cater for the wealthy Conservatism of London when it is airing itself in the country, Liberalism is often a strange mixture, composed of one grain of Theoretical Radicalism and two grains of Practical Liberalism, but very much modified by three grains of Theoretical Toryism and four grains of Practical Conservatism.

And this strange mixture is dissolved in the colourless water of life, and taken three times a day—morning, noon, and night—by the voting shopkeepers and lodging-house keepers, even while they serve their fashionable patrons at the counter or table.

It was for such an accommodating constituency as this that a tall young gentleman, fair, grey-eyed, semi-military in bearing, but very decidedly the civilian in his silk hat and superfine frock coat, was put forward at a by-election. He was the only son of a wealthy colliery proprietor of the North.

Put forward as a Liberal, he was returned as a Liberal, and he sat on the Liberal side of the House. Indeed, he had all the exterior symptoms of living modern Liberalism, but the facts which that gentleman really represented were: (1) Mr. Henry Brookster; (2) Messrs. Brookster, Son and Company; (3) social ambition; and last, and decidedly least, a vague, dormant, inactive Church-of-England Liberalism, the immediate offspring of Church-of-England Conservatism—a Liberalism of Faith without works; a Liberalism which, of course, regards progress as inevitable, but believes that it must have time, time, time—so very much time that progress will not trouble the personal interests of such M.P.'s as Mr. Harry Brookster; so very much time, indeed, that, so far as he is concerned, progress in certain moral and spiritual problems, falsely classed as purely economic because they deal with the so-called material things of the earth, must wait for that grand Radical Reform Bill which can only become an Act in the Upper House of Eternity.

It was this socially-developed Mr. Harry Brookster, M.P., who, during the intensifying strain of the miners' conflict, returned to Beckerton Old Hall.

He returned as the pride of his father; as some of the disembodied vanity of his mother; the prospective key to new London social shrines for his sister Bertha; the moral and material enigma to Dora, who was more earnestly groping with problems of right and wrong; the patient hope of worldly Miss Flemming; and the political and religious pupil of Mr. Waide—that kindly genial gentleman who had waited upon Mr. Harry's gratifying progress from the days of his baptism and confirmation, and was now only waiting to wait upon him in one other ceremonial of the Church—namely, his marriage—whenever and wherever that auspicious event might take place.

One afternoon in October, on the day following Mr. Harry's first return home from his Parliamentary duties, Mr. Waide said to Grace—a very-much-changed Grace, a fagged, nervous, and worn creature, owing to the heart-burning work among famishing families of men at last becoming desperate:

“We ought to go up to the Brooksters'. . . to congratulate the Member.”

Grace was silent. She was resting, by the doctor's orders, and she looked too listless to answer, as her long, yielding, meagre figure reclined in a low chair in her parlour. Her sensitive face, now much thinner, was in keen profile, and from the darkened hollows beneath the clear outlines of her brow, her now somewhat languid blue eyes, wearied with seeing both realities and visions, were by force of tender reminiscence once more sympathetically looking at a photograph hung low on the wall near the fireplace.

It was a snap-shot photograph of women and children crowding at the Miners' Arms soup-kitchen.

When Grace was in good health, her under-lip had a central fulness like a half-embedded cherry blended with the curves, and that was the one definite hint of passion in her spare physique; but to-day that was wrinkled, as if the troubled spirit had drained the cherry of its juice. She had heard her father, but did not heed. What was the use? It was the old, old strife—she on one side, and he on the other. Utterly wearied of the long and fruitless strain, she was silent.

"It would be a change for you," her father argued, sitting at the table edge, and casually taking up Grace's Prayer-book, opened at the Litany, where the following paragraphs, marked at the side and underlined with red ink, had lured his eye.

"We sinners do beseech thee to hear us, O Lord God, and that it may please thee to *rule and govern thy Holy Church Universal in the right way.*"

"That it may please thee to illuminate all Bishops, Priests, and Deacons, with *true* knowledge and understanding of thy *Word*, and that both by their *preaching* and living they may *set it forth* and *shew it* accordingly."

"That it may please thee to *defend*, and provide for, the fatherless children and widows, and all that are desolate and *oppressed.*"

Mr. Waide read the underlined parts with a greedy yet tortured glance. The red ink seemed to get into his cheeks. He put the book down as if it were bleeding.

Grace did not see the momentary act; and turning from the photograph, but without looking at her father, on second thoughts she said with smileless earnestness:

"Very well. . . . Yes; I should like to see him."

He gazed keenly at her to read if there was anything besides the pitiful and, to him, provoking gloom. But there was not.

He was puzzled. Why did she want to see him ? ”

“ I do hope, dear——” he began, and his thought was, “ that when we go to the Brooksters’ you will be sociable ; ” but provocation over the situation as a whole became so keen that, with almost aggressive emphasis, he said : “ I do hope, dear, that when you are better you will not trouble yourself so much about—those strike people again.”

Grace suddenly gazed at him with a burning light in her soul because of the cold darkness in his. She thought of the coils upon coils of inherited and acquired prejudices, from parentage, from education, from the Church, from life, that bound his spirit in Wrong, and gave it the illusion that it had the perfect freedom and knowledge of Right. For surely, after all, that must be the case with—*him*, her dear father. *He*, surely, was not *false* to his light ? Surely, surely, no. He was only true to his darkness. He was no hypocrite, pray God—no silent betrayer of the Christ in himself and others. No, no—pray God, no. Not that—not that ! ”

He regarded her new troubled look as a slight protest, and added :

“ I don’t suppose there are really as many as the papers say there are in—actual—want.”

That fired Grace a little. She said :

“ Let us be frank with each other, dear father—do let us be frank. *Will you go with me and see ?* ”

He lifted his brows, with the thought, “ For what practical purpose ? He could do nothing ; he was tied on the right and the left,” and even while Grace was pressing home her new suggestion he under the influence of lately whispered opinions and views—opinions that had filtered, like distant water through a sandstone rock, downward from the high head-quarters of the Bishops ; views that had gathered in damp, dank pools of stangation on the ledges of the deaneries and arch-deaconries, and dripped in smooth, green drops of words on the muffling mossy hollows of the vicarages, to the effect that the current Labour War was an exceedingly complicated subject and was best left alone.

"Why do you take the Brooksters' side only?" Grace asked, with an earnest appeal for simple truth that roused him. "You are Vicar of *All Souls*'. Why do you not try to know all the sides—the master's and the men's? Yes, the lady's and the woman's; the children of the one and the children of the other; the mansion of the one and the cottage of the other; the life in the one and the life in the other. They all live by the coal of Beckerton—the Brooksters as well as the colliers; but with what differences! It is preposterous, father. A ship wants coal to cross the ocean, thousands of colliers get it, piece by piece, even pound by pound, from places miles underground; colliers receive it, truck by truck, at the shaft; colliers load it, waggon by waggon, for the railway, and off it goes for practical use in the world. But in an office are two men, a father and son; they deal with the coal on paper, with a few strokes of the pen, and by the hundred thousand tons at a time. The thousands who get can only just live; but the two who sell, father—the two who sell!"

Mr. Waide deigned to reply: "There is the question of capital, child. But of course you don't, you cannot, understand."

"I can, and do," quietly replied Grace. "Mr. Brookster's grandfather was a stonemason, was he not?"

"Y—es."

"Well the only capital he had was his own labour. Then, to build, he began to use the labour of others. He built and built—and banked the results. Of his own industry? Yes, in part, but in a far greater part of the results of Nature and of the combined industry of others. The present Mr. Brookster inherited those banked proceeds from Nature and Industry called Capital; he leased Beckerton and Beckerton-beyond-Brow coal-pits, he virtually leases Beckerton and Beckerton-beyond-Brow colliers, and repeats what his grandfather and father did—he banks the proceeds from Nature, from his own industry, but more especially from the combined industry of others, for Nature herself will not give without some-one's toil. Now at this moment, ten minutes' walk from here, a collier's family in Brookster's Yard, the Booths, have not a penny coming to them from any source whatever. Three days ago they were starving—no mere wanting

—starving. The father had tramped to the big towns to beg for them; the children, almost naked, afraid and ashamed, would not go to the soup-kitchen; the mother took ill—wandering—talking to the children of Ashworth's confectionery shop; and all this not known until her neighbour, Nance Ockleshaw, opened the kitchen-window, went upstairs, and found the children around their mother on the floor. Next door, higher up, the woman has pawned her wedding-ring——”

“Ay, and where is your ring?”

“A widow——”

“And your brooches?”

“A widow in——”

“And your bangles?”

“A widow in Rose Court has just lost her son——”

Mr. Waide moved from the table. “You are fatiguing yourself,” he muttered, as he took out his watch. “The doctor, do you remember——”

“No, no. Do listen, father. Is it fair? You have heard the Brookster side for years; do listen to the case of the men for a few minutes. Don't be vexed with me, don't be hurt; I only want the truth, the whole truth, about the men to be known; no, not to be merely known—it is known—I only want it admitted, acknowledged, as justice and right.”

Mr. Waide resumed his half-sitting, half-standing position at the table. He tugged his white beard. He nervously pushed the Prayer-book farther away. His eyes seemed like alarmed birds with undecided fitful flight in the threatening dusk of a clouded evening. They but represented his spirit. It was alarmed, confused, fretful, inclined to fly hither, thither, anywhere; and yet his will was under the sway of necessary consideration for Grace. She was ill. That was how he consoled himself for enduring it; that was why he, her father, the Vicar of All Souls', a prospective canon, her intellectual superior, did not seriously argue or protest. He allowed her to proceed with:

“I was telling you of Widow Ashton. She could not bury her son; the parish coach came, and he and his father are in separate graves. She is in the workhouse, now, while we speak, broken-hearted—waiting, as she told me, for the same coach that took her Dick. Three

months idleness can bring these *getters* of coal to the most terrible want; but if the great *sellers* of coal lived *a thousand years*, at the rate of *five hundred pounds a year*, they could still die rich. I have calculated it. It is true, No one in actual want, father dear? Do men not in want leave their homes to sing hymns in out-of-the-way country places, at the seaside, and in the large towns? Do women, who have never begged before, take boxes into streets where they are known and ask for halfpence? Do children not in want crowd at the back-doors of the inns to catch the scraps usually thrown out to the dogs, or chase hens away from their food and steal it, or suck bits of boot-leather——”

“People have told you all that:—”

“Father,” said Grace, with the profoundest passion of sorrow; “these very eyes, dear father, have seen it. Oh, crime of grab and greed! Do little children not in want walk two miles to Black Hill in time for the dinner-hour to beg bread from the joiners who are building houses there? or watch a brewer’s horse feeding, taking their chance with the sparrows for the falling beans? or follow a commercial traveller peeling an orange, to pick up the peel? or stop him as he goes into the Golden Crown for dinner, begging him to bring out a bit of bread with him when he had finished? or pick a potato out of the gutter opposite a greengrocer’s, splitting it with a stone, sharing it, and eating it raw——”

“They would do that at any time, dear, they’re such little——” He did not say the word; he only looked it. “They are, really! . . . they’d eat anything. . . . You don’t know them yet, dear girl. *I’ve* known them for over thirty years.”

Grace was spiritually ashamed to hear his glib confession. He surely could not see the utter condemnation of himself by himself. She pictured thirty years of real Christian work, and then imagined God looking upon the work as it was. The juxtaposition was terrible, grim with censure, sad with the bitterest remorse; pathetic with moral tragedies torturing to think of. Tears sprang to her eyes as she resumed:

“Whatever the masters, the men, the mothers, or the homes may be, the children are innocent. They have not quarrelled with anyone.”

“N—o,” said Mr. Waide, touched by the tears. “N—o. I could help them, poor things.”

“And not the women?”

He paused. He felt along the line of her thought. For her sake he would yield a point.

“Well, if they were really in want,” he said; “though they, you know, are quite as much to blame as the men. If they had used their influence properly, the men would have gone in before now, and all this—eh—this trouble would have been prevented.”

With the warmest gratitude for the opportunity he was giving her, Grace, who had mastered her tears, very quietly said:

“You would help the children, you would help the women?”

“In extreme cases.”

“Then why not the men? *The men and their families are one, father dear. You cannot separate them—cannot.* Whoever keeps his home going—even his lodgings going—is part of the working collier. In the same way, whoever depends upon him is part of him—to suffer as he suffers, or to be happy as he is happy. To say that we will help his wife and his children, and not help him, is like saying we will help the acorn but we will starve the oak, so as to bring to it its senses—to live on less earth, less rain, less air, less sunshine. Though the collier’s wife does not now go down the pit with him, she is there in the results of keeping him in good condition for his toil; and though the children do not go down the pit with him—they will, some day. Starve the children, and you starve the collier of the future. No, no, father dear; the collier, his wife, his children, and his home are one.”

“The very reason,” said he, trying to recover lost ground, “why the men should have continued at work.”

“At a reduction?” asked Grace, feeling that she would have to tighten her hold. “At a reduction of twenty-five per cent. on a wage that runs from twenty-one to twenty-eight shillings, and sometimes gets as low as twelve and fifteen shillings, according to conditions? You know those conditions, father. You know that the day’s-wage men get from four shillings to four shillings and sixpence, and in a few places five shillings odd. But if all day’s-wage men got five shillings and threepence a day, do they not

earn it?—considering their special kind of toil, their constant risk, fathoms down the earth, one and two miles from the shaft under it; in the damp heat of one seam and the clammy chill of another; in low narrow cuttings where the man has to lie down, and only the arms and pick can move like the feelers of an insect in the earth." With a thrill that flushed her thinned face as in fever, Grace added: "*I know it!*" She stroked back her full, fluffy hair. "*I have been down, and never, never want to go again!*" she continued fervently, as she conquered her emotion before the fall of more tears. "Then there are the piece-workers. We know what the public are told that the piece-worker earns—two, three, and four pounds a week!"

Mr. Waide became uneasy again. He said:

"Remember, Grace, you are unwell. Rest a little."

But Grace continued:

"But the public are not told that the piece-worker has to pay three and four shillings a day out of that to *another man*—the "drawer," who trucks the coal and sees it through the workings to the shaft. *I know*—and you know it, father. Nor are they told that this wonderfully rich piece-worker has to pay about sixpence a week to a check-weigher to watch his interests at the pit-head, or that he has to buy oil for his lamp, costing from threepence to sixpence a week; or that he pays another fourpence or sixpence a week for the sharpening of his pick, to say nothing of mending drills; nor are the public told that the piece-worker has to buy his own explosive for blasting, at four shillings and sixpence a packet, and caps for firing it that cost three-halfpence each, and that he will use two or three caps a day. More than that, again, he is in a sick club and a permanent injury club, with a weekly subscription of from sixpence to ninepence for the two. And what is the practical *business* result to the collier? Why, that the wage that the piece-work collier takes home averages, according to favourable or unfavourable working conditions, from twenty-one to twenty-eight shillings. Then he has three or four shillings rent to pay, and after that he and his family have to live. Is this a question of trade only? Is there no purely moral question—no question of right and wrong as between the man who gets, the man who sells—yes, and the man who buys? Father dear,

thousands are starving! Speak to the Brooksters—do get them to open the pits at the old rate—the men are willing.”

He shook his head.

“Oh, I am ashamed, ashamed!” she murmured, half muffled to her hands. “Even the publicans are doing more than All Souls’.”

“Mr. Rew is at work,” said Mr. Waide, though against the logic of his attitude.

“But not in connection with All Souls’,” she answered, with shame and sorrow. “He has no orders. All Souls’ has no fund, no soup-kitchen, no clothes depot, no committee. It does not even preach. If you are convinced that the men are wrong, and therefore committing sin, why don’t you preach it? But Mr. Rew himself says that he is not the curate of All Souls’ at present; he is Wesleyan, Baptist, Salvation Army—anything Christian.”

“Sentiment! The problem can never be settled in that way.”

“Then in what way, dear father—in what way? Tell us. People are starving.”

“It is between master and man. Your process prolongs the quarrel; ours would shorten it.”

“Nay, the Brooksters don’t want to shorten it. At this moment, while thousands who got the coal now in stock are without proper food, to say nothing of money, the Brooksters are making a new fortune. Is that right? Now is it, father? Be candid.”

“They are only taking advantage of the market.”

“Oh, don’t, don’t!” she cried in pain. “Don’t speak of it in that cold, old-fashioned way. That will never solve it. Who forced the market? The masters; and now they are taking advantage of both the market and the men.”

“My dear child, I can do nothing. Why do you speak to me in this way? The Church is a third party, and has no voice in the matter.”

“No,” answered Grace, very, very quietly, “it has no voice in the matter because it has a hand in it. I did not know until yesterday that it draws coal royalties to the value of thousands of pounds a year.”

He looked at her as if she had discovered one of the many complicated nerves of his acts.

“And though the coal puts so much into the Church’s

hands for Christian work, the Church as a Church will not say a word for the getters of it, to defend them in their stand for a Christian living——”

“ It is a quarrel. We have no voice.”

“ We have Scripture—text after text; we have the Prayer-book—prayer after prayer; and if we had not these, there is the simple logic of humanity. Can two men starve two thousand others in the name of trade, market, or anything ? ”

“ Grace—you—must—not—put—it—in—that—way.”

“ If a collier starved his wife and children by turning his wages into drink, we would tell him that he was sinning; but if a proprietor impoverishes the same women and children by intemperately amassing wealth out of their underpaid toil, we dare not speak.”

“ I—do—wish—my—dear—child, you could see the question in another way. You speak as if I had never thought it out. And I am not alone in my view. The bishops themselves. . . . My dear, don't look like that ! ”

“ Oh, it is of no use, father—no use. The poor old Church is the House of Lords of the sects. It is prejudiced; it has its lords, its lands, its royalties, its rents, and will not speak. But—I must tell you, father—I wrote to the bishop.”

The sudden confession again brought tears to her eyes.

“ Grace! Grace! *Wrote to the Bishop?* ”

She sorrowfully said: “ And, like his Church, he is silent.”

“ You distress me ! ”

“ Silent. Then I wrote to our own county Member——”

“ Oh, my darling girl, you are disgracing me——”

“ Asking if he would draw the attention of Parliament to the representative facts of distress taken from the homes of sixty colliers which I had visited. *He did not answer.*”

“ And not likely ! You are acting now like a child, now like a fanatic. What can the people think ? The Bishop—the Member—Oh, Grace, Grace ! You will be the laughing-stock of the district.” Grace turned pale with a generous curbing of her spirit. “ The talk and laughing-stock of the place, I tell you. I do earnestly hope that you have not written to——” Grace read his thought and coloured. “ You have written to Mr. Brookster ? ”

Grace nodded.

" Mr. Harry ? "

" No. "

" To the poor old gentleman ? It is preposterous ! Simply disgraceful ! I'll be ashamed to show myself ! You forget your position as a lady ; you ignore mine as a gentleman. You act upon delusive impulses. You have seen too much of those people—that Ockleshaw set. " Grace generously suppressed her replies. " You cannot be well. The strain has told upon you, as I said it would. You must have a change—and at once. "

Grace quite unconsciously gave her head a slow, prolonged movement of dreamy dissent. She was thinking of Brookster's Yard—of modest, sincere, evangelistic, meditative Sam, who, from his bed of patient suffering, had made clear and definite her own vague vision of the real position of the poor. She was thinking of all Beckerton and its moaning, murmuring, urgent needs. Go away ? No, no, no.

But her father—what of him ? A sigh as from a tomb of dead hopes came from her.

Not even yet could she influence him by word. He stood aloof from moral argument that was to her but a natural sequel to the gospel of compassion, peace, and goodwill. She longed to be at peace with him. With quivering lips that could not speak, but with eyes that looked straight from her heart to his, she rose and fell upon his neck. In agony she suddenly remembered that she had done that before. Nevertheless, her spiritual ardour had the courage to do it yet again, and her affectionate, appealing, assuring embrace was like one ardent wooing thought for his conversion made tangible about his neck.

History seemed to be repeated with him, too. Tears were almost upon his eyelids. He looked up as if through the ceiling straight to God ; but a Pagan face in the shadows of the decorative plaster-cast centrepiece grinned down at him with horns. His eyes closed, and tears fell like a new baptism of regeneration upon Grace's hair, as she sobbed her grief and hopes over his very heart.

" Do not distress yourself, my darling one, " he murmured near her cheek. " I am not vexed with you. "

His misinterpretation of her act increased her sobs, and she clung to him with the clutching ardour of pain.

"Patience," he said, patting her head—"patience. . . . Have patience with yourself. . . . You mean well, I know. You will understand the other side of the question soon."

That went into Grace like a hot, oppressive breath, and she felt faint.

There was a knock at the door.

Neither of them heard it.

The maid opened the door, but instantly stepped back and returned to the drawing-room with her trouble so ill suppressed that Mr. Harry Brookster read beneath it, simply left his card, and went.

Driving in his brougham, he reflected. Trouble? Perhaps they want help. He returned.

He found the maid in tears, in resistless sympathy with the household grief, which was the greater for being mysterious. He said a kind word, gave her half a crown, and sent in his card.

After a little more than ordinary delay he was led to Grace's parlour. He was in black, and entered with the briskness of a pleasure steamer in the presence of two limp sailing ships, heavily cargoed, becalmed, and with the tattered signs of a recent storm.

Mr. Waide, however, caught a breeze, and welcomed Mr. Harry with a good show of sail, and piloted him to Grace.

The firm, cordial clasp of his hand upon hers was related to the days when they played together; when he used to lift her upon his nursery steed and ride her all the way to London; when he used to chase little Grace about the room and, to the more fully-developed rapture of the nursemaid, catch her by the frock, and kiss her against her will—a will too young to be strong, yet coyishly protesting with dormant disdain for the forced gifts of a patronizing boy.

But her will was now no longer young; her disdain was no longer dormant; and she now knew the world.

And yet at that instant a strenuous outside appeal suddenly came, as if a prayer of her father's, instead of going up to heaven, had shot into her. Perhaps she could turn the power of wealth to new account. Perhaps, after all, in that one respect her father was right. Perhaps in that he saw clearer than she did. Perhaps God Himself was at that moment at work. . . . No, no; for a most gruesome fancy flashed upon her—Christ clearing the

temple of the money-changers, and then marrying an heiress. The thought of humble but honourable and clear-headed Sam Ockleshaw came to her. What would he think, with his insight into things? And forthwith her firm, sad face declined a thoroughfare for the smile that had been waiting within to come out and greet the sympathetic gaze of Mr. Harry and the past.

No, no, no. Marriage itself was too often paid by a wage of sin. Even her father should not have dominion over the inner angel of true life.

A travelling, tremulous, rumbling murmur as of aerial muffled drums entered the parlour, though the door and window were closed. Mr. Harry was still standing. He looked at Mr. Waide, and both looked at Grace.

Without moving, the three gazed out of the window. The brougham horse's ears darted now forward, now back, and now straight up; his nostrils were working; his fore-feet were testily prancing; and the fat coachman, with bitten lip, was lashing the horse to give it nerve, the fat coachman's own eyes looking ahead like globes of light from a puffed red face.

The deadened metallic thuddings of hundreds of hurrying clogs mingled with the now unmistakable hootings of a travelling mass of human beings, hooting and travelling as if enmassed as one.

"*The men!*" muttered Mr. Waide. "Mr. Harry—the men!"

And like a sudden flood around the buttress of a bridge a groaning crowd surrounded the carriage and horse and looked up at the Vicarage—growling, groaning, hooting, booing, and both in sound and aspect more like the lean, lank, famished pale doubles of men who were too clemmed to come in person than the veritable men themselves, with their sunken eyes set in rings of purple, wild with want; and mouths the more cavernous for the sunken, shrunken cheeks, as they again huskily growled, hooted, and groaned as if hunger, as such, had at last found shape and voice.

It was an inhuman sight and sound: as if God had repented making man in His own image, and had allowed Civilization to transform man into something worse than the normal state of the very wildest beast, which, given food, is peaceful, affectionate, and beautiful; and to make

of him a frenzied, haggard being, compared with whom the very tigers in the jungle, the lions in the forest, and the apes in the trees, have sane, logical lives of cherished felicity, based upon the inherent laws of their kind.

No wonder that Mr. Harry, member though he was of that British Parliament which boastfully rules so very much of the world—no wonder that he turned pale and tugged his moustache with a desperate effort to keep up the Oxford tradition of cool-headed composure under all conditions whatsoever, from the losing of your hat to the losing of your life. He whispered to Mr. Waide :

“Gad, they mean mischief——”

“No, no,” said Grace ; “I hope not—for their own sakes.”

“But they do ; they’re after *me*.”

It looked very like it, for two daring fellows, amid applause, opened the Vicarage gate, climbed upon the Vicarage window-sill, and peeped like searching masks into the room.

“I can’t have that !” said Mr. Waide as the two men retreated ; and opening the parlour window, he—heard a suddenly intensified chorus of booing and hooting.

He spoke.

They growled.

He lifted his arm.

They laughed.

He tried his voice and arm again ; but the men hooted their severest version of contempt. He was shocked. That was the plainest human speech he had heard in all his life, and he turned away as if he had been hit beneath the heart.

Grace led him to a seat.

Harry, pallid, but like a soldier filling a breach, took the Vicar’s place at the window. His reception was still wilder. Many men strained forward to have at least the sensation of laying hands upon him ; the groans took a definite sound ; two words were passing round—the sound was as if some tunnel, suddenly becoming vocal, were growling : “The can, the can—the al, al, al ! The can, the can—the al, al, al !” But the majority of the men soon marked the same time, and the words rose with ironical clearness :

“The canal, the canal ! Give him the canal !”

Harry, baffled and ashamed, retreated.

"The fools!" he muttered to Grace. With intensified pity for her slandered men she sped to the window.

The growls suddenly turned to a wild exclamation of delight. A cheer went up. And another. The men saw her tears rolling down, and up went a still louder cheer than before.

She put up her hand, and the few over-enthusiastic men who would not at once contribute their silence to the solemnity of that moment seemed threatened by the others with passionate annihilation. All the faces became like ears, as, with the deepest emotion, she said:

"For my sake and your own, dear men, do no violence—do no wrong."

"Art ta still *for* us?" cried a great hollow, husky voice. It was Ned Ockleshaw's. He was close-cropped and just out of prison.

"Yes, Ned!" she heartily replied, singling him out; and there rose such terrific enthusiasm in their grateful shout of relief that Grace herself lost control of speech, even if speech could have been heard. She could only smile, and make gentle signs with her hands that they were to go quietly away; and the muttering mass moved off like a passing wind in the dark.

CHAPTER XXV

AN UNEXPECTED MISSION

As a guarantee of protection, Mr. Waide, an hour after the men had gone, suggested that Grace, who was out of the room, should drive home with Mr. Harry.

Mr. Harry, the member of the British Parliament, who, at the persuasion of Mr. Waide, had once thought of entering the Church; who, according to his own inclinations, had once thought of entering the army; but who, at the urgent request of his father, had decided for the hereditary lines of Parliament and coal, was hurt by this suggestion.

"I'm not afraid of the beastly fellows. By Jove, but they shall suffer for this! They'll be taught to—howl. They mean riots, do they? Dawbairn can soon get a

few redcoats down; that will gallop them into their senses."

"Oh, it need not come to that, Harry——"

"But it shall, though. I'll not have them grinning like that at me. They'll come up to the Hall next."

Mr. Waide, exercising the privilege of earlier days, soothingly patted Mr. Harry on the shoulder, as he said:

"No, no; I think not. But, of course, if they did, then life and property would have to be protected." As if the life and property of the Brooksters were the only life and property there and then needing the urgent protection of the moral law; as if, indeed, no thought whatever entered Mr. Waide's mind about the lives of the thousands who were being starved, the property of the poor that was being sold and pawned, in consequence of the obstinately selfish attitude of a father and son.

"Protected? I should think so!" said Mr. Harry.

"But you had better let Grace drive with you. Do. There is no trusting those fellows just now. I know you are not a coward; but two or three hundred against one, Harry—would be awkward. I should not like anything to happen; and, only for Grace, I must confess they looked as if they meant mischief. Don't think too much of her present attitude, Harry. 'Twill pass. A girl's sympathies sometimes will not allow her to see things in their purely mercantile light. But she will come round again. I was speaking to her this afternoon, and, quite apart from what has happened here, I should like her to drive with you, and see the girls and your mamma a little. It will do her good; so don't say No. I would come myself as well, but it's Friday, and I haven't a line for Sunday yet. I could come later on."

Mr. Harry and Grace were soon in the brougham together.

It was a grotesque situation, Mr. Harry verily believing that he was performing a sort of lay moral mission in conveying Grace to the bosom of his own people by her father's wish; and Grace herself feeling that a most exalted moral impulse, and not the Brooksters' coachman, horse, and brougham, was really conveying her to Beckerton Old Hall.

They sat well back upon the same seat—silent, moody, each rather tremulously afraid of the other within the confined space of that carriage with the windows up.

A mingling of moral and amatory emotion took Harry,

Oxford traditions notwithstanding, by surprise. He turned to her—he actually put his hand upon hers—and she, divining possibilities of good for her own cause in the act, did not shrink from it. She endured it for the sake of the men. For the same reason she listened with generous forbearance, as he said :

“ You are interested in the men, Grace. Would you like me to persuade father to let them go in ? ”

The condescension pained her ; but, as earnestly as if she were a miners’ delegate, she asked :

“ At the old rate ? ”

That business-tone now pained him, but he replied, “ At the old rate,” and the pressure upon her hand was slightly increased, conveying quite a new train of old ideas to Grace.

As a reply, Grace’s hand very gently coiled into a fist under his and withdrew. At that moment there met and filed past both sides of the carriage, in the darkening twilight, men in twos and threes : the most gaunt and wretched-looking beings—worse even than those who visited the Vicarage, worse in every sense—with tattered and shredded clothes, worn-out clogs and boots ; and, for want of a barber’s penny, with long hair and rough beards ; their pitiful faces, looking as if they also had become unkempt, tattered, and worn. Haggard eyes looked out of some of those grim faces into the carriage, as the men passed it with a wearied-sounding tramp, tramp, tramp, towards Beckerton-beyond-Brow and Beckerton itself.

“ They have—sticks,” remarked Harry.

“ Only to measure the stones they have been breaking for their food at the workhouse.”

“ O-h—Ah ? ”

“ Poor, poor fellows,” murmured Grace towards them, regardless of Harry, as if she would have her sympathy go out to them through the glass of the window. “ *Poor* fellows ! And would you not,” she added, with well-directed implication, “ for their sakes alone persuade your father—quite apart from us ? Do not think of our associations, Harry ; think of theirs.”

Mr. Harry now wondered what sort of a Grace Waide he was taking home with him. Her tone was as much on the side of the men as ever. After seeing those men

he could hardly wish that he had travelled alone, and yet he regretted the situation as a whole. He was afraid. She would speak to the governor; the governor might forget himself, and say something rash.

They drove in silence until the gritty sound of the new gravel on the drive made him feel that they were approaching at very close quarters.

The brougham, with some elaboration, swept round the circle in front of the entrance, and as it came to a stand, Grace said:

"Will you tell your father, please, that I would like to speak to him?"

"If you wish it," he answered, handing her out, and walking up the steps and into the entrance hall with her—by which time a diplomatic idea came to Mr. Harry. He could show Grace into the library, go in search of his father, and return without finding him. He was sure it would be the best course to take, even for Grace herself. Then she could see his mamma and the girls.

He showed her into the library. She would not sit. She preferred to stand.

"I'll not ring for Hess," said Mr. Harry, trying to be easy by familiarity, "if you do want to see the governor? Will you not see mamma and the girls?"

"I particularly wish to see your father—here," answered Grace, with her hands clasped in front, and standing firmly. "You can ring for him, Harry," she said, with a suggestiveness which told him that she was alive to the opportunity which the situation offered for false swearing.

He could not look at her—he excused himself—and went. He would have to see the governor.

Mr. Brookster would not take Harry's suggestion, and be reported out. He had received by an evening post a winding-up call for £3,000 on some American shares that had gone wrong, and was in excellent condition to meet even a young lady on the question of profit and loss.

His short, thick-set figure was soon in the presence of Grace's delicate, tall one; and the library door was abruptly closed upon them both. With a briskness that was much more related to the business office of Messrs. Brookster, Son and Co. than to the private residence of Mr. Peter Brookster, J.P., the magistrate faced the daughter of the Vicar.

Grace, however, was still Grace—nay, more the true Grace than ever. Perceiving the worldly spirit of his entry in the bluster and flush of the physical, she, to make matters at least friendly to start with, stepped forward and offered her hand.

To his own amazement, Mr. Brookster took it—nay, through the sympathetic hold of his hand in hers he felt that he was in the presence of a Grace Waide rather different from the imaginary one for whom he had briskly braced himself up.

“ I would like Harry to be present,” she said.

He withdrew his hand, saying :

“ I presume you have come about the men, Grace ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ Then, what you may say to me you will practically say to him.”

Her pale face coloured, and his red face turned pale. With an appeal in her voice, she said :

“ I particularly wish Harry to be present, Mr. Brookster.”

His colour returned as if to warm his words, as he replied :

“ Will you kindly say what you have to say, Grace. Whether Harry is absent or present will make no difference—to me.”

Her blue eyes sparkled with earnest, far-seeing meaning as she answered :

“ But it may do so to him.”

He ignored that.

“ What—is—it—that—you—wish—to—say? Anything besides what you have already written? I did not acknowledge your letter, Grace; I thought it better for you not to do so. For the same reason I have not mentioned it to anyone—not even to Harry . . . nor to your father.”

“ My father knows. I told him. There is no shame, I hope, Mr. Brookster, in either a man or a woman trying to bring about an understanding ? ”

He did not answer.

“ That is why I have come now. Pits for fifty thousand men have been opened at the old rate in parts of Yorkshire, Nottinghamshire, and Derbyshire. Why not open your pits, Mr. Brookster, and bring to an end a distress

that is terrible to know and look at, to say nothing of enduring——”

“It’s their own fault, child. It’s in their own hands.”

“Pardon me, Mr. Brookster, it is in yours. The men were at work; you stopped them.”

“And I shall do so again! Allow me to say at once, Grace, that you are interfering with affairs that you do not, you cannot understand.”

Grace was wounded, but she checked the merely personal feeling, and replied:

“I understand this—the men and their families could not live decently at a reduction. Some cannot do so comfortably even at the old rate—it is a struggle—one week good, another week bad, and the best week never too much for actual needs—often not enough.”

“They must take what they can get, like we have to do.”

“That is hardly a parallel, Mr. Brookster. Whether the pits work or not your home is safe; want cannot come near you. Do think of it—please. You represent thousands of pounds, but I represent thousands of lives. Open the pits, I implore you! Your pit-banks are almost clear” (he tightened his lips). “You have sold to good account” (he narrowed his brow into ridges). The women and children are suffering famine, and the men are getting——”

“A great deal too impudent!” . . . With sudden self-suppression he continued: “It’s of no use, Grace. I understand your motives, and all that; they’re very good as far as they go—as far as they go; but sentiment isn’t business. Now, don’t be vexed” (Grace gently bowed), “but there is my side to this question. The men are led by the ears by paid agitators, who ought to be thrashed for interfering with trade; they want teaching a lesson.” (Mr. Harry entered.) “I am telling Grace that there is *our* side to this question. We knew that for some time trade had been going wrong; and if it goes wrong with us, it must go wrong with the men. But the men are idiots—well, fools: fools to themselves, fools to us. They want teaching a lesson, and the only way to do it is to put them to the pinch.” Tears sprang to Grace’s eyes. “But there, I don’t want to hurt you; I understand that you are unwell. Come and see Mrs. Brookster and the girls.”

Grace quietly shook her head to the invitation. The tenderness of her womanhood glowed into something like a masculine emotion of will. She resented being tenderly considered, or politely shunted on to the side-track of what to her would now be the conventional pretences of friendship of the Brookster drawing-room. Moreover, a strange bracing sensation of new strength came to her. She felt very much more like Sam Ockleshaw than herself. It was with his valour of heart, in defiance of his social trammels and the sufferings of both body and mind, that she gently urged with something of his quiet sincerity of manner and tone :

“ Will you listen to me, Mr. Brookster ? ”

“ Y—es.”

“ Not as persons who know each other in social life——”

“ Well ? ”

“ Not as the daughter of your old friend, Mr. Waide, to Mr. Brookster ; not even as a woman to a man ; and, above all, not as the usual lady to the usual gentleman ; but solely as one creature to another ? ”

The same frowning expression came to Mr. Brookster's face as when he uttered the words, “ Sentiment isn't business,” and with ironical innocence he said :

“ I—eh—don't understand. Do you, Harry, boy ? ”

Harry impatiently answered, “ Listen, listen ! ”

“ Well ? ” remarked Mr. Brookster, as if he were suddenly caught between a fire and an iceberg. “ *Well ?* ”

“ Why,” she asked, conscious of quoting from Sam, “ why will not employers admit in practice what they are so often forced to admit in theory—that master and man are, after all, *one* in their interdependence upon each other ? Why will they not admit that capital as capital has grown into quite an artificial importance as compared with the real importance of labour—of indispensable labour, of labour which, in conjunction with the riches of the earth, was the first capital ? Why will the masters forget, in the false prominence given to wealth, that if to-night all the banks in all the world, all the safes and strongholds—yes, if all the money of the globe, sank into the earth or vanished into air—labour could do without it ; labour could again do what it did before : make, little by little, first in small ways, then in big ways, further accumulations of property over and above that earned for

living ; further gatherings of surplus earnings for both master *and* man ? Why will the masters not act upon the fundamental truth that, though they piled capital upon capital, and capital still on capital, in gold, in bank-notes, in stocks, in shares, in any conceivable form which money takes, that though they piled it with the most ardent longing, or with the most austere commands at the pit-mouth, at the factory door, or along the quays or on board ship, *it* could do absolutely nothing ; it, with all the extravagant pretensions made for it as to its vital necessity in the world, would have to rust, rot, and wait until humble, dutiful, faithful labour came along with the magic of the will, the strength of the body, and the fervour of the heart. Oh, Mr. Brookster ; oh, Harry, dear Harry, when I picture what labour's lot might be, what it ought to be, and what it is, I marvel at the endurance of man ; and when I think of what capital could be and could do, I pray to live until that good time coming when it shall cease to be an instrument for oppression, and a material and spiritual curse to both master and man. As the proprietor of the Beckerton pits, Mr. Brookster, it is in your power to save at least four thousand men, women, and children from want, from degradations which the poorest dog that has liberty to rove does not endure——”

“ Nonsense, child ! ”

“ No, no. *You* can save them from want, from hatred, from crime—from dangerous ill-will.”

Harry fancied that he heard hooting and, acutely listened.

“ *You* can save them from nurturing the spirit of evil where it should be modified and checked ; a word from you will stop starvation, sickness—even death.”

“ *I* am willing, father,” said Harry.

“ Then I'm—not ! ” his father replied. “ I'll *teach* them——”

A far-off shot was heard.

Mr. Brookster and Harry exchanged curbed looks of alarm.

Grace stood as if wishing—hoping—even praying for relief from the suspense.

“ More poaching,” muttered Mr. Brookster.

“ Worse than that,” said Mr. Harry, as he and Grace heard hootings which Mr. Brookster did not hear.

Suddenly the library door was opened, and in walked

Mrs. Brookster, holding up the elaborate train of her rich dinner dress, closely followed by Bertha, Dora, and Miss Flemming—all pale and so alarmed that, though they saw Grace, all, with the exception of Dora, but passively acknowledged her.

“There’s a riot,” said Mrs. Brookster.

Bertha added :

“The sounds are terrible by the drawing-room.”

“Awful !” said Miss Flemming.

“It’s poaching—poaching !” argued Mr. Brookster ; but Hess, the footman, entered, saying :

“I beg pardon, sir ; but help is wanted. Someone’s shot——”

Grace was the first to answer the call. She followed Hess, Mr. Harry followed her, and Mr. Brookster followed him. Dora made an attempt to follow her father, but the other ladies prevented her, shut the library door, locked it, and examined the window-shutters.

Under the light of a lantern in the centre of an examining group of Beckerton Hall gamekeepers and coachmen on the garden-party lawn was the insensible form of a collier, bleeding from the head.

“Who is it ?” asked Mr. Brookster.

“‘What is it ?’ should be asked,” said Grace, quickly looking at close quarters at a gamekeeper with a gun, and significantly feeling the barrel, which was warm. She stooped to the form, saying, “Ned Ockleshaw ?” but Ned did not heed. “This, this is what it is coming to !” she rapidly murmured, feeling Ned’s great hand. “Why don’t they put *this* as part of the price in their contracts !”

“He’s all right,” said Mr. Brookster. “Lift him. Get him home !”

“Nonsense, father. He is not fit,” answered Harry.

“Help, men ; carry him indoors.”

“To the lodge,” said his father.

“To the nearest !” urged Grace. “And send for a doctor.”

“We have, miss,” said the coachman.

And Ned was carried, moaning his way back to consciousness, to the gardener’s lodge.

CHAPTER XXVI

CHEERS AND COUNTER-CHEERS

AFTER close attention from Grace, Harry, and the doctor, Ned Ockleshaw revived ; but he was faint with the loss of blood and the gnawing want of food.

Grace wished to get him on the road home before the news worked some of the Beckerton-beyond-Browites into a band for vengeance, and, unknown to Mr. Brookster and the others at the Hall, Mr. Harry very readily ordered out the purple brougham.

He, too, volunteered to go with Ned home, but Grace (afraid of his safety among Ned Ockleshaw's more violent friends) made his services appear quite unnecessary.

And so Ned Ockleshaw and Grace Waide drove off in purple state, with two coachmen on the box, one to give courage to the other.

Half-way home the horse had ominous memories of the Vicarage, and became very restive. The coachman began to speak so loudly that Grace could hear him ; she could also feel the bucking jerks of the horse as it now answered the switch of the whip and now the twitch of its own nerves by trying to swerve round to make for home.

The horse had good reason to be alarmed. Murmurs, moans and hootings were coming nearer, not very far behind the herald of the night wind.

In a few moments the horse was forcibly stopped, the carriage surrounded, the door opened, and a miner's lamp thrust in.

The light fell upon Ned's yellow, haggard, languid face, with a streak of blood across the brow, and upon Grace's feverishly alert pale face near it.

" Good Lors A'mighty ! " said one man.

" We're done ! " said another.

" It's Ned hissen ! "

" An' Mess Waide ! "

" No ? "

" Yes ! "

" No ? "

" 'Tis ! "

“Bravo!”

“Hurrah!” “Well, aw niver!” “Who’d a’ thowt!” were the mingled exclamations amid which Grace vainly tried to make herself heard. The fact that she spoke only confirmed the wonderful fact that she was indeed there.

“Fair sperits an’ ghoasts!”

“It may well be near Watch Witch Wood!”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Hip, hip—boys; gi’e ’em one!—hip, hip, *hooray!*” But this splendid single effort of one man did not catch voice. There was too much exciting scrambling at both doors of the carriage by the ungratified colliers in the rear; too much ratifying and confirming; too many individual excitements to make a unanimous and harmonious one.

“Make way! Here the little witch o’ Watch Witch comes! Here her is, all wind an’ sail! Now, Nance, woman! Get out o’ th’ road, tha Jack-a-Lantern, an’ let Nance hev a peep at her livin’ Ned. Now, in wi’ thee, little woman!—he’s *theer*—in *wi’* thee!—tha’ll see him i’ th’ best cuttin’ o’ Beckerton coal he’s iver bin in. Theer they are! Shut th’ doors on th’ three of ’em—an’ we’ll hev a play at horses.”

“Reight, lad——”

“We will so——”

“We’ll gi’e ’em a trot——”

“Now, tha two button-an’-livery boys, bring down thy coat-o’-arms; down wi’ thee, or i’ two tickles there’ll be some arms about thy coat! Ay, whip thysens off yon box. An, now, out wi’ thy nag! Every man on us is a thoroughbred worth two o’ thy fidgety, frightened, neighin’, and jiggin’ bit of fretfu’ horseflesh as seems more fit for step-dancin’ nor owt else. Out with him, frightened tail an’ all; an’ if thy eight legs can keep up wi’ ours, they can do so—behind. Now, boys, fill up shafts wi’ th’ best arms an’ legs tha has; some push at back, some keep abreast o’ wheels an’ doors; an’ every man Jack, Dick, Tom an’ Harry o’ thee gallop wi’ all thy legs and ‘hooray’ wi’ all thy lungs. Ready? One—two—three—and away! One—two—three—and hooray!”

“Hooray!” came the answer from the right and left, and the front and back.

“Hooray—hooray . . . hooray,” travelled the echoes

and waves of sound down the hill over the canal, up the black banks of slag to Beckerton-beyond-Brow, and with the breeze into Brookster's-yard, into the Ockleshaw cottage, straight to the hearts of Rachel and Sam, sitting with old Dan, who was flickeringly on the far, far verge of the tremulous miracle of momentary life so very like death that it appeared more like death faintly living than life slowly dying.

Rachel whispered :

"*Aw thowt it wor th' air sound o' death-watch*" (she rose with Sam) ; " but it's th' men, aw do believe——"

They listened at the door.

" Ay ; it's th' men," said Sam. " They're cheering. Something good's happened."

" It's from the Hall way. Maybe Mester Brookster's gev in."

" Ay, I hope to God in heaven so ! " came from Sam like a prayer. " I had a mind to see Mr. Brookster myself to-day. Ay, that's a ' hooray ' as sure as sound's sound ; and it's making this way by Dalton's Dyke and the Vicarage instead of by the short-cuts and over the canal by the brick bridge. Lord ! but that sounds like in-at-the-old-rate, does that."

" We mun thank Miss Waide, aw should think. Her wor *goin'* to speak, aw believe, an' aw hope her *hes*—bless her ! "

" Hark, lass, hark. Why, they're round by th' Brow road already. *Hooray !*" shouted Sam with all his force. " Hooray ! "

" *Hooray ! hooray !*" came the quite unconscious reply of the running crowd in return.

" Is—it—old—rate ? " shouted Sam as if to the night.

" *Hooray ! hooray !*" came the clearer reply.

" Why, theer's wheels—or someut," said Rachel.

" If it is old rate, I wouldn't be surprised if they've got Mr. Harry in his carriage for celebration ; for some of them will lose their heads when they *do* win."

All the seven doorways in Brookster's Yard suddenly became frames for excited listeners—passing surmises to and fro, hoping the best, wishing to catch the merest hints of definite good news in the still enigmatical cheers that were coming nearer in the dark.

In but a few minutes' time Ned Ockleshaw, pallid,

limp, weak, and with his wound newly bleeding, was carried into his cottage and placed upon the kitchen bed—Rachel in tears; Sam's hopes dashed, yet Sam himself undaunted; Nance and Grace too busy with water and bandage to heed grief.

The fevered men, hot with enthusiastic exertions suddenly at an end, with their mate Ned wounded worse than they had surmised, and the whole of Brookster's Yard distressed, now realised the crisis of life and death around which they had been cheering in illusive, empty, ridiculous triumph.

They fell a-cursing and a-growling—prowling like deceived and dissatisfied wolves around even that innocent material representative of the Brooksters, the brougham, as the horse was being backed into the shafts near Brookster's Yard.

Some suggested "a smash"—and to pitch the purple pieces—ay, horses as well—down the shaft of No. 2. But Sam, hearing of this, struggled into their midst. If they talked like that he would get inside, and if they smashed, they would smash him.

Then Grace spoke appealingly, and the men stood aside and allowed the brougham to drive off, but not without a wild, hooting bellow at its windows—a bellow which you would think would reverberate like the audible double of the voice of a mob about the ears of all who would ride in that carriage again.

Grace, curious about the Ned Ockleshaw incident, asked three of his known close companions among the men what took Ned up to Beckerton Old Hall.

The light of a lamp was upon all of the men, and they were ashamed. They thrust their hands down their pockets and stood mute. The actions were as good as words. *They* knew. Oh, yes. Ay, ay. Why, indeed?

"Was it poaching?" she asked.

One of the three men tugged at his vest with one hand, and pressed down his little velvet skull-cap with the other. The other two exchanged semi-cynical smiles.

"I know, then," said Grace, "and I am exceedingly sorry. It will do us harm. It will go against us. No, men, no. Don't take to that. Revenge is a poor thing in the end. You went to catch the keeper who got Ned into prison?"

The man with the velvet cap looked down and worked

the form of a cross on the ground with the toe of his clog, as if he were putting his mark to a confession transcribed down there by Grace.

"I was afraid so," she sorrowfully said; "but whatever they do, you keep your hands clean. We will win yet! And not by foul means, but fair."

"Then, it'll be by thy means, miss," called one of the crowd.

And Grace and Sam returned to the house to wounded Ned.

CHAPTER XXVII

NANCE'S REQUEST

ONE wonderful afternoon of cloud and sunshine—when the valley of Beckerton-beyond-Brow was like a dark etching in blue-black ink, now a battle of sunbeams sabring the massed battalions of clouds that were firing hail, lightning, and thunder; and now like a land in a shroud white and still with the whiteness and stillness of death—a broad, dumpy hawker woman, with a small ware basket on her arm, tattered mittens on her distorted, rough brown hands, which peeped like dark bull-frogs from under her dingy, dark shawl, and a gray goat-like little beard on her chin, familiarly stepped out of a slant shower of heavy hail into Nance's cottage, and sat in the first chair, saying, as if to the kitchen:

"My lor, Nancy Ockleshaw, lovey, but angels are busy wi' fire, stones, an' wayter to-day."

It was an awkward intrusion. Sam made a signal to his mother to get Rachel out of the way; Ned looked almost murderous in his bandages and frowns; old Dan sat as if listening to echoes; and Nance eyed Rachel as if to see the best way to speak to her; while the hawker woman, with no more expression in her dim gray eyes than in sea-worn pebbles, continued in a sing-song strain of plaintive, monotonous meditation in keeping with the unchanging blankness of her apparently obsolete lines and wrinkles:

"As aw wor tellin' Vic'rage lady's door-lass, as aw've nothin' to do wi' save what aw hear here, theer, an' nowheer

up an' down lanes an' towns at back o' country sides wheer harpenny buttons an' tapes fit this an' that or him an' her——"

"A pen'orth o' laces, Martha," said Sam, to bring her to business.

"Aw never sell black mohair laces but what aw think o' suitable black ropes for hangin' wi'——"

"Oh, damn the woman!" growled Ned.

"Thank thee, Sam; *aw've* heerd o' thee an' Vic'rage door-maid's lady—penny here, an' penny theer, brings us som'at for Sunday an' weekday, for I mun go to my Zion wi' my penny i' the mornin' an' my harpenny at neight, as preacher wor sayin' if ev'ry'un kept Sunday as owd Martha did, an' for weekdays a sip o' tea an' bread an' the like; it's just as when aw wor in 'sylum ward wi' doctor, is these white stones rattlin' at windows like to some mite's bones th' wind's tired o' keepin'——"

Rachel stared strangely.

"Rachel, good lass," appealed Nance, as if asking a great favour, "wilt go an' mak' bed upsteers? Aw forgot it."

To Nance and Sam's relief, Rachel went.

"Her's still wi' th' scare her gotten yon day aw ear'd on when thy man Ned theer wor sendin' Beckiton keeper to judgment day. Doctor wor good; he said aw mun never come out to th' earth an' world again if aw cried, as aw couldn' help doin' when tears com'd i'stead o' my man, as I put i'to park cimitry under a slate stone wi' his name i' print as aw can't read iclept through my grand-lass who's school'd to threepence a week as aw pay wi' buttons an' laces, an when aw wanted to cry unberknown to doctor aw crept under bed—ay, under bed—aw wor clever—an aw cried to my man as if aw wor under grass wi' him at park cimitry. Wheer's Ruthy Rouse? Aw miss'd her. Wheer? Dosta know, Nancy? Her owes harpenny for buttons. Wheer is her?"

In a low voice, Nance said: "Away."

"Put away *agen*? Her com'd out two year ago and wor as right sens'd as yo' or me. It's strike as turn't her?"

Nance nodded.

"Well, her munna cry, or doctor'll keep her from th' earth an' world *agen*."

"Her cried enough afore goin' in, poor wench," said Nance. "Her wor a woman who *would* try an' stick ahead o' debt, but her got behind at shops, her began flarin' on it week by week, an' it told on her. Without this lock-out Ruth would hev bin in her home this minute. It's enough to mak' straight uns go off th' head, let a-be anyone as has been a bit crooked afore. Now, Martha, it is fine; shower's gone," said Nance, hearing a foot-step.

Sam also heard it—he knew it—against his own good-feeling he urgently whispered to his mother, "*Ay, get her out!*"—and Grace appeared at the door as old Martha rose.

At the sight of Grace entering, old Martha curtsied like an accordion closing and opening three times, and, to the intense satisfaction of feverish-looking Sam, went away without saying a word.

"I called to see Rachel," said Grace, looking neither at Nance nor at Sam. "And how are you, Ned?"

"Better, thank ye, Miss Waide."

"That's right. Is Rachel in?"

"Aw'm sorry," commented Nance, as if she had seen through a prank of Rachel's. "Has her bin troublin' *thee*, Miss Grace?"

"No, no, no," rippled Grace pleasantly. "No, no, no," she repeated, so pleasantly that Sam so fought with his own enjoyment of such tones and smiles that he actually frowned. "Is she not in?" asked Grace, with a little private and confidential information to reveal.

"Her's upstairs, miss—bed-makin'."

Sam frowned still more at that vulgar detail, and almost spoke out.

"It was only that she wanted me to write to Wales to Britton Lloyd."

"Poor lass! And tha *did*?"

"And here is his reply—he's coming soon——"

"Hey, but God's love on thee! Tak' it up. Tak' it to her. Go up wi' it, Grace!—aw *beg* thy pardon!—but it's like as if aw'm sweetheartin' mysen when aw think on th' good it may do the lass just now. Ay, straight up, Miss Grace; turn to th' left, an' reight for'ud in." Grace disappeared. "God Hissen *love* that dear un!" gratefully murmured Nance to Sam. "Poor Rachel

wants comfortin', aw know, and her'll get it, ow, in as sweet a way as ever it came from lad to lass."

Sam picked up a free library book as one would pick up a mask. Ned got his cap and pressed it on his bandages and went out. Old Dan, knowing that superior society was in the house, was feeling his spare hair back and front. Nance went the round of the kitchen with a duster like a detective on the track of invisible dust. Now and then with sympathetic suspicion she eyed Sam, who, though he held the library-book with extraordinary earnestness, was no more reading than a winter housefly was just then reading the newspaper on which it was wrestling with an all-absorbing crumb of bread on the window-table.

When Grace was heard crossing the bedroom floor to come down, the duster was flung into the cupboard, and Nance, with an earnestness as extraordinary as Sam's, took up a half-knitted stocking and sat in her rocking-chair deeply concerned, profoundly counting stitches.

As Grace came from the staircase, Nance whispered :

"Aw needna ask if her wor glad."

Grace nodded, and inquiringly approached the little round table where Sam was seated with his book.

Sam rose and offered his chair.

Nance winked at her old familiar friend, the oven door, in appreciation of his courage to be polite even before his own little mother and Dan. She was sure the lad was polite in both talk and ways when she was not there, but it was beautiful for her own eyes to see him daring it ; and she was grateful as for a special favour of Providence.

"Rachel looks better," remarked Grace, sitting.

Sam, book in hand, went to the chair between the window-table and old Dan's chair.

"Oh, her'll be better when things quiet a bit. It wor a start and fright she had wi' policemen, made worse agen t'other night wi' Ned. No news, aw s'pose, through thy fayther and Mr. Brookster?" That touched a problem deeper than Nance suspected.

Grace sorrowfully shook her head. For relief she turned to Sam, saying :

"What is your book, this time?"

Sam's eyes kept downward—he was afraid of his own voice. Rising, he stepped towards the round table, and held the title-page for Grace to read.

"Book-keeping?"

He nodded, and the blue of her eye caught the blue of his. Lo, some of the delicate flushing of her cheeks seemed to leave them and to pass invisible through space, and to reappear in his paleness as he again sat in his chair—blushing. He tugged his fair beard into a point.

Nance, as if from the very centre of the confined space between one stitch and another, remarked:

"Book-keepin', Sam? Tha doesna want a book to learn *thee* that, judgin' by the way tha keeps all the books tha buys. If we dust 'em, tha seems to think Rache an' me's rubbed off some o' th' inside readin' through their backs."

"This is for accounts," briefly explained Sam, to put a stop to the pain of his mother's ignorance.

"Aw dunna believe in 'em," said Nance. "Cash as tha goes along is my way."

Grace and Sam exchanged risky smiles expressive of a higher standard of knowledge.

"But it's a puzzle," said Sam. "I am trying to make out an account current, as the book calls it, for use when the lock-out is over; but the debit and credit seem the same as each other at times, and I can hardly tell which is which."

"Can I help you?"

"There now!" said Nance. "Hark to that! Thank thee, miss. Sam's a terror for learnin'."

"The awkurd—the awkwardness—is that it's a fancy account, and yet I want to put it as if it is true—as in fact it is."

"Have you any of it on paper?"

"Only the beginnin'—the beginnin'," answered Sam, feeling in his side pocket, and he handed a sheet of ruled paper to Grace. She read aloud:

"'The Coal-owners of England and Wales in Account Current with the Public. Debit. Credit.' Well?"

Nance looked up. Her admiring eyes followed Grace's question across to Sam.

"Well," he answered, "I want to show, as near as I can, the amount of money that the colliery proprietors are really in debt to the public over this lock-out."

"Well done," said Grace. "It is worth doing. Have you any of the times?"

"Not in exact figures yet, but I would put against them the thousands upon thousands of pounds they have got from the public for coal sold at a much higher price than their original profit; the thousands of pounds they have forced the Federation to spend; the £18,000 that the *London Chronicle* and the *Sun* have, up to the present, raised between them; the thousands of pounds that people have given in private, and in chapel and Salvation Army collections; the thousands of pounds' worth of food that the shopkeepers have given——"

"Not *thousands* o' pounds, Sam——" said Nance.

"Thousands, mother, when you think of the shopkeepers in every mining district distressed. I'm not thinking of Beckerton and Beckerton-beyond-Brow only. But I am sure it gets into the hundreds with them alone. Oh, I've thought it well out."

"Tha hes, lad. But aw mun wish tha thousands o' thoughts 'ud get tha thousands o' pounds."

"And I'd put against them the extra price some towns are paying for gas in consequence of the rise in coal; and the extra expenses of some ships a week longer on their voyages because of the bank dirt and slack sold for coal; and the loss in wages to the thousands of railwaymen, engineers, ironworkers, and chemical workers, who are stopped owing to the lock-out; and the extra expenses at workhouses for the extra paupers and tramps; and the charges upon some districts for the military and extra police—in fact, I would put down everything that is extra to the public in consequence of the action of the masters to serve their own profitable ends. Yes, I would even include damages for the loss of that child by starvation near Barnsley, and for the suicides of those two small coal-dealers in Liverpool who could struggle no longer, and came to the end of their money and wits because of the artificial price of coal."

"Poor souls," murmured Grace. "That account is very simple," she added. "It is all on the debit side. Is there no credit?"

"None; but a good deal of disgrace," warmly answered Sam, smileless, too serious to enjoy his own point.

They heard a woman's voice outside, and they listened. It said: "No, sir; not here, sir; next door but one, sir, is Ockleshaw's."

Nance rose, rubbed her face with her apron, and went to the door. At the sudden and quite unusual sight of the Vicar, she was almost guilty of making a curtsy, but, thinking of Sam, she checked herself. With ill-suppressed excitement over the honour of the visit, she turned pale, and nervously said

"Cross o'er, sir! Aw hope nothin's amiss at home, makin' thee come for the miss as is here. Wonna tha come in, Mr. Waide?" Grace rose. "Here her is—rose ready for thee, tha sees."

He saw, and was annoyed.

"That is my son, Samuel, sir."

Sam rose.

Mr. Waide nodded, and eyed Sam from head to foot, with a special return glance at his face.

Then, while Nance was explaining who old Dan was, Mr. Waide ventured a covert glance at Grace. He caught her conscious of his disparaging inspection of Sam. He fancied she looked a little on the defensive—independent—with possibilities of daring in her, if in the least way opposed. So, a moment or two behind the informal introductions that had taken place, he rather pointedly shook hands with Sam. He passed on to do the same with nervous old Dan, who was standing stoopingly supporting his agitation on the arm of his chair with one hand, and feeling his front lock with the other.

Mr. Waide, to hide his now intensified annoyance, affected not to be in a hurry, and stood in his Brookster drawing-room fashion, talking to all, with his back to the fire.

Nance thereupon thought him most lovingly sociable and humble. Nay, she fairly trembled with the excess of her unuttered joy at the visit. She looked at Sam, glad that he was in his black, wondering how he appeared in the eyes of the Vicar; then at Grace, and wondered for the first time in her life what sort of an awkward, humble little figure she herself appeared, in the eyes of both the Vicar and Grace. A sudden hard thought of all-round Ockleshaw inequality saddened her eyes. Even while Mr. Waide was asking old Dan about his earlier days, she wished that Sam would speak out some of his very best ideas. "Not to hurt th' Vicar; no, no; but just to show his best inmost value outmost."

But Ned with his bandaged head came in. Mr. Waide nodded remotely, as he continued speaking to standing old Dan.

The Vicar urged old Dan to sit down; but old Dan, out of respect for himself and a much intenser respect for the Vicar, would do nothing of the kind.

Nor would Nance sit. She felt as if it would be chemically impossible in her suppressed effervescent state of domestic, social, personal, and even spiritual excitement.

Nor would Sam sit—but only because Grace continued to stand. He judged the Vicar, and read him through and through.

Grace stood because she well knew that, despite the apparent ease of her father, he was impatient to go, and would go at the very first moment that he decently could.

Ned put his tongue into his off-cheek, sidled into the back-kitchen, and out through the back-door, for precisely the same reason that Nance wanted him to stay—"for th' Vicar would surely give 'em a prayer." She most ardently regretted Britton Lloyd's absence in Wales; otherwise they might have had a hymn.

Nance had just completed that deeply-religious regret; and was again directing her practical thoughts towards Ned, devotions, and the family Bible, which was fortunately well in view when the Vicar made an abrupt and effusive movement to go. He began with Dan.

Nance's lips quivered with disappointment; the nerves about her eyes twitched. No prayer? No anything? Absolutely nothing in that way. Then, what had he come for?

The Vicar was favouring old Conservative Dan with a hearty grasp of the hand, and about six generous shakes; yea, and even a supplementary pat on the shoulder, such as a lord might give to a hind once in a lifetime, and win a reputation for good-fellowship to the third and fourth generation.

Then followed minor degrees of respect. Nance's knotty little hand was shaken with the double abruptness of a hasty postman's knock, with the addition of a smile from one who was evidently thinking more of the giver than the receiver. She almost cried. Sam's hand was lightly held, lightly pressed, and suddenly let go; and there was

no smile, but rather the shadow of a coming frown, which on second thoughts turned back within the Vicar's brow.

Grace saw Sam's eyes suddenly sadden with inevitable conclusions about her father. She was ashamed. With justice on her firm brow, she deliberately turned aside to agitated Nance, and shook her affectionately by the hand. Then she turned with exquisite frankness to Sam, and, with her hand in his, she delivered straight into his suddenly gladdened eyes quite a flash of a smile as part compensation for damages in consequence of that shadow of her father's frown.

From the doorway her father called :

"Grace dear—I'm ready—come."

There was a violent clap of near thunder. Mr. Waide paused. Then a fall of bouncing hail ; and Mr. Waide and Grace retreated a step or two into the kitchen again.

Nance had timed the mingled tears of her disappointments and her gratitude to fall the moment that the Vicar and Grace had disappeared ; and as the Vicar and Grace stepped back, they gave Nance's grief less room than it had been promised—hence the little woman disappeared into the back-kitchen, closed the door after her, and pretended to herself, so as to pretend to Sam if he followed, to want to know if the bottom of the dolly-tub were perfectly clean ; and into that she bent and wept.

But only for a moment. Opening the back-door, she looked through her tears and the slanting pelting hail to see if there were any signs of hiding Ned.

Not a sign. A lightning flash caused her to think of Rachel. She boldly left the back-kitchen, and went upstairs just as if the Vicar were a post and Grace its shadow.

Rachel, quietly sitting on her bed with Britton Lloyd's letter in her hand, was like a love-lorn maiden in a picture, perpetuated there in a reverie that could not be dispelled, even though her lover entered her apartment through the frame and the glass.

"Aw've 'card o' thy news," whispered Nance in low, private tones. "How arta, lass? . . . Britton's comin', it seems. . . . How is Britton's mother? . . . Come, Rache, love, bestir thysen a bit, or aw'll think tha'll stare a hole through th' floor. . . . If tha did, tha'd see th' Vicar. . . . Wilta come down?"

Rachel, without a change in her eyes, very slowly shook her head.

Nance nodded hers in sorrow.

"So tha'd rayther stay? . . . But as soon as they've gone, thee come down, Rache, lass; tha'rt no nearer th' lad up here nor down theer. Hey my, but yon glass an' chest o' drawers wants dustin'. Gi'e 'em a rub, lass—an' set mantel-shelf tidy—an' get at knittin'. Aw'll go."

Descending into the kitchen, Nance said:

"Hailin'-stonin' yet? Worse nor never! Sit thee down, sir, an' let's shut th' door—it's cold for thee——"

"Oh, it will only last a moment or two," answered the Vicar, resolutely looking out.

"Longer nor that, aw hope—now—for—— That's right, sit thee down, Miss Grace; tha knows my thought may be so much wordier nor aw do mysen, that p'raps tha'd be so good as speak it;" and, as an illustration of her wish, Nance confidentially put her two hands together as in prayer, and cast her ardent eyes up to the ceiling.

Sam, still standing, became restless. He tried to catch his mother's eye, but instead he caught Grace's; and she, reading his quite unnecessary uneasiness, playfully censured him with her smiling tace poised aslant like a distant white skiff in the wind and the sun. He forthwith sat down, won over into submission with an exquisite distress.

Grace favoured Nance's idea. Perhaps, after all, the innocent, sincere, frank little collier woman would be the means of breaking the obstinate social and religious formalism of her father; and forthwith Nance went to Mr. Waide, saying:

"Tha mun excuse me, Vicar, good man, but aw'd sleep better i' my bed this night if aw didn't go to it wi' th' thought as tha'd bin an' gone an' there was nothin' i' th' way o' communion betwix' us all an' th' Almighty i' these hard, hard times—tha knows what aw mean. Aw'm askin' more for my Rachel upstairs nor for any o' us, though all on us could do wi' helpin'. Aw'm wishin', too, my man wor here, as someut prayerly from thee might put him in a quiet way, as 'ud help his sore head to get cured."

Mr. Waide looked as if he would brave the hail outside.

"Oh, it's not fairin' yet, sir, by a thick white shower or two. Just a bit of an offerin' up, Vicar, please, if tha's

a mind to it. Of course, Mr. Waide, just as tha thasen pleases; but aw've a strange troublin' feelin' about thee leavin' us without a word. Agen my own will, aw'll fear tha hev someut agen us——"

"No, no——" said Sam.

"Now, it's no use, Sam, lad, o' thee puttin' for'ud one opinion now an' another aifter; an' one contradictin' t'other like a couple o' women. Leave me a-be. For my own part, aw'd *like* a word or two; may happen as Mr. Waide would like as well—thank thee, sir!—a minute!—aw'll close door . . . an' get hearth-rug for thee to kneel on. *Dan*—keep awak! Aw'll just run to back-door. . . .! No; Ned's not i' sight—an' aw'll listen at foot o' the stairs i' case Rachel's movin' to come down. . . . No, her isn't. Hey, bless her this hour!"

Mr. Waide knelt by a chair, and Nance, Grace, Sam, and Dan knelt by theirs.

Mr. Waide had got half-way through one of his favourite collects, when, by the back-kitchen door, Ned entered dripping with sleet and hail. Suddenly subjected to a ruthless religious surprise like that, he looked savage. None looked up but Nance. She pointed to a chair as to a pew.

"Oh, darn this double-face foolin'!" he shouted, stamping the floor as if to split his clog. "Darn this foolin'!"

Nance and Sam rose. The Vicar stopped and rose too. Grace, shocked with sorrow, continued kneeling, with her burning face pressed almost flat upon the chair.

Nance and Sam hustled Ned towards the back-kitchen, but he would not go. Raising his hand, and pointing to the Vicar, he said in his fiercest tones of contempt:

"If, i'stead o' goin' down on thy trousers to One as doesn't tak' any notice o' thee, tha'd put thy hand on th' under side o' Mester Brookster's neck——"

Sam and Nance rushed Ned into the back-kitchen and then briskly out through the back-door, and put the lock and bolt between him and them.

When they returned to the kitchen to bolt the front-door against Ned, they found that Mr. Waide and Grace had gone.

But old Dan was still on his knees like a fixed emblem of those few extraordinary moments; and no wonder, for he had dozed.

CHAPTER XXVIII

A LESSON FOR SAM

Two more weeks of hunger and anger passed. There were no signs of the end. Brookster's Yard, like the whole of Beckerton-beyond-Brow, was in turns dejected, desperate, defiant.

Sam Ockleshaw was particularly defiant, as if with new fervour from some invisible source. He was mysteriously jubilant and energetic. Give in? Go in at the old rate? No! He would fight to the last crust and the last clog; and so would every man of them.

Wise little Nance shook her head. She had troublesome new thoughts. "Aw know," she mused; "aw see. Sam may jubilee as he likes. This extra heartiness is hartificial, and has no more to do wi' lock-out, nor th' crow of a cock."

Nance was perfectly right. Like a gently-whirling eddy, shadowy, and yet sunlit, at the side of a river rushing on at full flood, at the side of the great labour agitation affecting thousands of people in its course, there were two beings in the gentle whirl of other emotions—now sunlit in Sam's eyes; now darkened in Grace's; now sunlit in hers; now darkened in his; and with a murmur so very low that to even them it seemed voiceless in the louder sounds of larger events.

Nance fancied that she had seen something of this mystic play of feeling in Grace; but, ah, she should have seen, in the privacy of Grace's parlour, the sudden transformations of intense paleness into an intenser flush, and the gaze of moodiness changed into a flash of secretly joyous thought. She should have heard and seen Grace on her knees in her own room; asleep in her own dreams; awake and alone in her own fancies—then the new agitation had a speech of the emotions which Nance could hardly have read without pity in regard to a new and profound influence outside of Grace.

Rightly read, even the new markings and the recently-turned-down pages of a certain part of her bedroom Bible were significant.

If the Old Testament portion of that Bible was opened at random, it opened at the Book of Samuel, where most of the moral attributes of that character were underlined; and in one well-marked place was the faint black-lead marginal note of "S. O."—so very, very faint, that it seemed as if the trembling finger-tips had written a whisper of the spirit on a passing visit to a secret shrine.

Grace felt these emotions as a sensitive aspen-tree quivers to the varying breezes of a day.

Humble, meditative, silent Sam Ockleshaw felt precisely the same emotions; but he felt them more like the stiff blackthorn that cuts the spring breezes as they pass, yet sheds its blossoms in the strife. What did it all mean? What could come of it? Was Destiny cruel or kind? So asked both Grace and Sam.

One afternoon Sam was alone in the kitchen, dreamy, moody, a little dejected.

There was a knock. His pallid face flushed. He anxiously felt his hair, his beard, and his tie. He rose doubtfully. At last he opened the door. It was Grace.

"Is the little lady in?"

"No—but——"

"I'll only leave this parcel; it's for Mrs. Brooks——"

"Rachel—mother—I'm expecting them—they'll be in soon," said Sam, widening the door.

His sunken eyes made her sorrowful.

"Well," she answered, stepping forward and placing the parcel on the table, "I would like to explain. I'll wait a little."

Grace sat in old Dan's chair, and Sam again opposite the fire.

"Ah, of course; I've overlooked another parcel," Grace pleasantly said, as her hand sought the pocket of her very plain brown dress—"a smaller one, and yet a larger one;" and Sam was handed a registered letter.

He only looked at the address.

"You may read," she urged; and Sam took out the letter, and with some effort read the peculiarly thick and heavy writing as follows:

"PRIVATE.

"Grosvenor Mansions, London.

"DEAR GRACE,

"Here is a note for £20. Do with it as you think

best. I send it because, with extreme personal regret to me, to-day's meeting between the proprietors and the miners' delegates has not resulted in an agreement. The delegates declined arbitration——”

“ Yes, their *kind* of arbitration, no doubt,” commented Sam.

“ My sympathies are with the men, but the delegates might have yielded for the sake of a settlement——”

“ No, no. It would be a quirk of some kind. There is arbitration and arbitration.”

“ But he is very good, is he not? Twenty pounds! . . . but if it had been twenty twenties we could do with it. Still, it is good of him—is it not?”

“ Very good. Very. Don't think that I spoke without thinking so just now. I was only remembering what we are fightin' for—a wage that we can live on, a wage that would be without sin, without causing sin of some kind—that is all—and would the masters' kind of arbitration make us sure of that? Our leaders thought not. And the masters wanted work startin' with a fifteen per cent. reduction banked in case arbitration went against us. No, no. That's admitting reduction. And we don't do that. Oh no. Still, it will try some of the poor fellows, I know God help them! May they keep their hands down; that's all I want——”

“ How is your father?” asked Grace.

“ Better. It is the women I'm thinking of. It's a woman's question——”

Without looking at him, Grace said that it was. The deep, fervent tones of Sam's voice caused her to picture him in Parliament in the place of Mr. Harry. Harry had not a voice like that. Harry had not earnestness like that. Poor Harry seemed to be merely toying with events—the most vital events of thousands of people's lives. Work or play, it did not seem to matter much to him. And yet it was such easy indifferent lives as his and her own father's which, along with the lives of the greedy, brought about the moral necessity for Acts of Parliament to do justice to others by force. If there were more Sam Ockleshaws, moral acts would not require Parliament to put them into force; they would quite naturally put themselves.

"Very much a woman's question, and for their sakes alone I, for one, would not pretend to consider a reduction of wage as a likely condition for a settlement. For have we starved only to *pretend* that families cannot do with less than the old rate? No, no. Whatever money a man takes home, he expects food. It is the woman who has to find it—whether she buys it, begs it, borrows it, or gets it on credit. It falls to her lot, by one means or another, to have it on the table three or four times a day. If she gets into debt, *she* is blamed; and if anyone goes short she is the first. What is the meaning of all the little kitchen and parlour shops in Beckerton and Beckerton-beyond-Brow here? The meaning is this: The woman has to set to work to make a bit of profit out of this and that, to make ends meet. The wage isn't enough to do all she wants to do for her children, and she turns extra worker in that way. No wonder the women are as determined as the men. They know who has to meet the grocer, the baker, the butcher, the rent man; ay, and the husband and the children. They know, too, if food has to be begged, who has to beg it. Who does the lock-out begging now? The men? One here and there; but the women turn out by the dozen to beg for the bairns, the husbands, and themselves. You know that, Miss Grace."

Grace nodded and looked down at her hands.

The act reminded him of the absence of her ring and brooch, and he said warmly:

"Why, if the men's Sunday clothes have to go to pawn, or if the women's bits of valuables have to go, *she* takes them; *she* brings them back; *she* pays the interest! The men may be the wage-earners, but the women are the providers, and they know the difference between 'too little,' 'enough,' and 'a little to spare.' Women have the worst of it, *I* think——"

"Oh, but there are many compensations—her affections, her self-sacrifices. Men don't quite understand that in women."

"I think men understand it too well! They take advantage of it. That's one of the things that make me wish I was a woman, to protest——"

"How do you mean?"

"In every way in connection with a poor home. It's the woman, the woman, nearly always the woman that

does—and the man, like a master, looks on and lets her.”

“But that’s part of the sacrifice—Sam; part of the pleasure—to her.”

Sam shook his head. In his warmth, his English relapsed a little into dialect.

“You mean one kind of thing and I mean t’other, miss. Clean or dirty, heavy or light, *she* does it, and your man looks on. Before marriage, the lass can’t get o’er a stile hersen; but after, she mun get the load o’ coal in, cut chips, fetch water, dig potatoes, and I don’t know what all. Strike or no strike, it’s a woman’s question.”

“Ye—s,” said Grace, somewhat convinced of Sam’s general view, and yet clinging to the intuitive feeling for womanly surrender, sacrifice, devotion, even though they included the roughest requirements of home life. “But that is all part of the woman, and especially of the wife. She must *give* herself.”

“~~I’d like it to be a little more of give-and-take. I know that if I——~~”

That sentence was finished only in Sam’s silence . . . and there seemed to be a commentary upon it in the marked silence of Grace.

During the pause, the wind shook the front-door, large hailstones fell straight down the chimney, and rattled on the window-panes. The door of the chip cupboard was pushed gently open, and Tibby, carrying a kitten in her mouth, placed it within the warmer region of the fender; returned for another; and yet another; and then curled herself about them like a muff, purring her satisfaction to the little ones regardless of everything else in the world.

Grace stooped and stroked Tibby’s head, saying:

“Poor Tibby. Good Tibby. . . . And you don’t like wömen to make sacrifices, then?”

Sam did not answer.

“The poor dear thing wants some milk. Is there any in the house? May I look?”

“I’ll look,” he answered, rising.

“You see,” playfully called Grace, as he went to the back-kitchen, “you won’t even let a woman do that.”

“The jug is empty,” said Sam, returning.

“Then, I’ll go for some.”

“No. Oh no!”

"But I—will. I must. The poor thing——"

"Rachel will be here soon."

"If Rachel can go, I can go;" and, taking a jug from a hook on the plate-shelf, Grace went.

That acted like a hint upon Sam. He reflected. Sacrifice? The creature seemed capable of it to any extent. She was like a new Grace Waide. And yet he could not bear it. If *he* were only different—he lost patience. He wished the lock-out over; he wished it had never been. He wished——

"Now, Tibby, here is some milk for you," said Grace, entering and filling a saucer. "There, now, Tibby. Why, your master here did not want me to go! Can you believe that?" Grace knelt on one knee and stroked pussy's back, as the lapping tongue flicked to and fro. "But he doesn't know *us*, does he, Tibby? No; you are quite right, puss, he doesn't. Don't stop. Take some more. That's right. Poor puss! I dare say he thought you went to a great deal of unnecessary trouble when you carried your little ones to the warmth. But it made you happy; and going for this milk has made me."

Sam sat guilty. That banter was not banter to him. It was censure. He wanted to explain himself into her good opinion again.

"You are hard on me," he said. "I did not like you to go."

"But why?" she answered, as she sat again. "That, you know, is not according to your own principle that all necessary labour is co-equal. There is no humiliation in *anyone* going for milk if it is wanted?"

"N—o."

"Nay, a certain honour if there is urgent need."

"Y—es."

"Then it is all because you have not seen me do anything of the kind before. If it were required, would it be *wrong* to scrub this floor, or make that bed, or put coal on that fire? . . . Not according to your own ideas as between master and man, Sam. You taught me that yourself."

He was confused.

"Still . . . a man does like a woman to be . . . to be something more than what a man is—that is, if he has the best—the—eh—well——"

The front-door was opened. Nance entered.

"Hey, my sakes! On'y as I hope you two couldn't talk nonsense, aw'd think thee wor copyin' our Rache an' Britton Lloyd, an' the rest o' common folk."

"Rachel hasn't come back yet," said Sam.

"But aw know thy kind o' love, miss. It's like th' church's name—for *all* souls."

"You're looking better to-day, Nance."

"Ay, thank thee, Miss Grace; aw wish aw could say the same o' thee, for tha deserves to look as well as an almanac, tha does; for, as I wor goin' to say, thy kind o' love is on'y part o' thy love for ev'rythin' an' ev'rybody, good an' bad, big an' little, sick or well, rich or poor—an' it mustn't be mistak'n as extra special for one more nor for another. Hey, puss, lass, who gev'd thee thy milk, for aw left not a skim linin' on a basin i' the house, aw know—but, as aw wor on th' edge o' sayin', miss, 'twould be a poor kind o' general look-out for the world if others didna love on th' owd-fashioned lines o' lovin' som'b'dy i' particular— Here's Rache. Ay; aw thowt so. Well, lass?"

Rachel's eyes filled with tears. She looked strange, a little absent.

"They tuk th' babs in?"

Rachel nodded.

"Her's bin wi' Mrs. Gummidge's little un to the union, Miss Grace. Aw wor afraid it wor runnin' short o' proper meat wi' us just now. 'Twor gettin' as thin an' as white as a new clay pipe. . . . Cousin Lizzie's babby's dead, Rache."

"Dead?" asked Sam.

"Dead, lad. An' nowt ailin' it, aw'm right well sure, but what's ailin' the most on us just now. It's a toy of a coffin *her'll* want."

"Poor thing!" murmured Grace. "I'll call."

"Do, Miss Grace. Cousin Lizzie's a poor, fretful lass i' trouble. Her's always nipped, too, wi' havin' *her* deaths i' bad times. When her two-year lass died, her man—Ted as we call him—wor out o' work, and her hadna money to put the lassie i' th' ground. Her wanted to put th' bairn wi' her own mother, for her wor called aifter th' granny, but that wor seven miles o' rough road off, an' poors' ground wor only a mile; but Lizzie risked th' cost o' coachin, it, tuk th' bairn to lie wi' its granny—

an' next day Liz an' Ted wor wanting for bread. But her has a tender heart, has Liz—her can't help it, her lets hersen go wi' it—an' when her once begins th' fret, theer's no gettin' to t'other side of her tears. Aw know this : her primed me to-day till aw could bare hold on to mysen ; an' yet aw'm more sorry for Ted as cries nowt, says nowt, does nowt, but stan's as if he wor Lot's wife, all white salt, lookin' back at th' bairn's bed."

There was a knock. It was a telegram from London for Sam.

"Aw pray the Lord it's good news!" called Nance.

Sam read aloud :

"'Tell the men to be firm. Distrust offers to open pits at old rates, but on new working terms. Tricks are going to be tried.'"

Nance, Grace and Rachel were silent.

"Paste it on the window, Rachel," said Sam quietly.

"I will, Rachel is tired," said Grace ; and she did so.

Again Sam wished it otherwise ; and Grace, understanding this, cast him such a convincing argument in her earnest and yet conciliating glance from the window, that, while Nance and Rache were talking about Cousin Liz, he smiled in quiet approval of the one more humble and commonplace thing she had done.

Then he turned away, afraid to meet her eyes—afraid to think definitely of the new Grace Waide who was so exquisitely revealing the real and the ideal.

He resolved to study "Todd's Manual" and "Cobbett's Grammar" that night like a giant.

"Wheer's grandfayther, Sam?" asked Nance, but Sam did not hear it. "An' thy fayther? Out, aw suppose, showin' his bandage like a band o' good conduct an' promotion to his corner mates? An' what is this parcel?"

Grace explained, rather indifferently, that it was a bundle of cast-offs for anyone in Brookster's Yard, and moved to go.

But in came Britton Lloyd, fresh, cheery and plump, straight from Wales. His eyes singled out Rachel. But she looked pale, thin, vacant, unresponsive. Nance nudged her, saying :

"Rachel, lass!—Britton, se' thee!"

Rachel feebly put out her left hand, and as Britton only held it, though pressing it hard, Nance said :

"They're afraid o' thee, miss. My sakes! if tha worna here there'd be sich a mix-up of arms an' faces as tha couldna tell which was which!"

Sam shuffled with impatience, with almost fierce intensity wishing that Grace would go; and she did.

Britton at once flung his arm around Rachel's neck.

Grace turned back to ask for Cousin Lizzie's new address.

Nance was about to explain, when Grace hastily said that she knew it, and went.

"What's up with her?" said Nance. "Her's all of a nerve, an' her has the flush an' the steely spark i' th' eye of the first end of a fever."

Sam vigorously clenched his hand at his side. Then he slyly looked at his mother to see if she had observed him.

As Nance went towards the plate-rack near the door, she said:

"Aw hope hers keepin' well, Sam. Ay, aw hope so. Her's worth a popilation o' th' jim-crack sort. Her is so; and to so many. Brookster's Yard's not *her* on'y nest wi' eggs. . . . Lors, lady miss, aw hope we hav'n't kept thee waitin' at th' door long! Aw wor talkin' to my son here o' Grace Waide" (Sam was in torture, wondering to what unseen lady this familiarity was addressed), "an' wor sayin' we hope her'll keep out o' some o' the fever as is rayther more common nor welcome just now."

"Miss Waide has been here, then?" asked Miss Flemming. "I am seeking her."

"Bin an' gone, lady. But wonna tha come in? If tha'rt a friend o' hers, tha'rt welcome; our name's Ockleshaw; mayhap tha's 'ear'd on us; if tha's walked far, step o'er an' rest afore tha dips down to canal an' climbs up to th' Vicarage."

"Thank you, I will," said Miss Flemming, entering just as Rachel and Britton rushed out by the back-door. Sam rose to receive a visitor whose exceptionally fair hair and blossomy complexion he remembered having seen in Brookster's carriage in the spring.

"My son, miss."

Miss Flemming acknowledged Sam by a very slight inclination of her head, and—so Sam felt—by a remarkable repetition of Mr. Waide's covert inspection. This put Sam on the defensive.

"Sit thee here, miss—tha'll pardon me missin' thee if

aw ought to missis thee. Aw go by th' finger-ring as a rewel, but tha has thy glove on. Ay, tak' th' rockin'-cheer if tha has more mind to it nor this, an' welcome. Aw darena ask thee to open thy furry cloak, 'less it wor to keep our cold skeleton of a fire warni, for coal's out o' question 'less tha steals it from th' banks. Aw wouldn' answer for th' fayther, but me an' Sam here wouldn' warm oursens by stole fuel a-fear o' Satan hissen settin' up fire-shop for thieves, on the hearth——"

"Miss Waide comes here often?" said Miss Flemming, with appreciative pleasantry, as she coughed into her little lace handkerchief, from behind which she eyed Sam as from behind a masquerader's hand-mask.

"Her does! But not often enough for *our* likin', lady."

"No? No; I suppose not."

Sam sat. He rose. He sat again. Nance looked reproachfully his way. Then she said to Miss Flemming:

"Hey, dear, dear, but it's more nor one thousand pitias as this betwix' masters an' men has come betwix' the Vicar an' her—as aw s'pose tha knows it has?"

Miss Flemming nodded.

"An' not betwix' her and him on'y, aw s'pose—Brookster's as well, by all accounts. Aw once thowt her wor for Mester Harry, but now it's Mester Rew."

Sam backed his chair loudly. He wished to shout. He felt as if he had risen to his feet, and yet was sitting as doomed to stillness as a post.

Miss Flemming tittered pleasantly, "No, no" . . . and . . . and for the third time glanced at Sam. He looked straight at her with eyes of scorn.

"No? Tha thinks not? Well, her deserves the very best gentleman th' country has, her does! Her deserves a *gentleman*, does her!"

"You think well of her. I'm glad."

"Aw should think so; an' we're not the on'y ones as does in these quarters——"

Sam rose.

"Stop it, mother!" he said, going to the front-door and closing it. "Can't you see? It's a spy—drawing you!"

"Sam—Sam—*Sam!*" cried Nance, shocked, as Miss Flemming rose, struggling between dignity and guilt.

"Do—you—know—sir——" Miss Flemming began, vainly trying to look honest.

"Yes, I do know!" broke in Sam, and with the quiet eyes which she had thought unobservant now full of the knowledge of her trick.

"Sammy, lad!" appealed Nance, going to him, "tha'rt not thysen!"

"That's just what I am, mother," he answered, twisting away and opening the back-kitchen door, and then the outer door. "Miss," he said, returning, "out, please!"

Miss Flemming halted, dumb up against her gathering confusion.

"Now, out with thee! And when you come pryin' next, come to th' back-door and creep up the stairs."

Miss Flemming went out with a surface dignity on her humiliation and defeat, and left Sam trembling to the core.

* * * * *

In the Brooksters' drawing-room that night Miss Fleming had a most absorbed circle of listeners when she related how she went to the Ockleshaws' cottage, as she had bet a pair of gloves with Bertha that she would; how she saw the celebrated Sam in seedy black and a shredded collar, like a Methodist preacher; how his talkative, fussy little mother dusted the chair, and wiped her face, and rubbed her hands and twisted her lips, and didn't stand in the same spot for three consecutive seconds. Then, in the absence of Dora and Harry, she told in stricter confidence how, to win yet another pair of gloves from Bertha, on the way back she had called at the Vicarage, interviewed Grace, who was in her plain brown dress without lace, without even cuffs, without even a bangle, and with her straggling, fluffy red hair looking about as bright as a marigold that has not quite entirely run to seed.

This was intensely cruel, and yet Mr. and Mrs. Brookster and Bertha enjoyed every word of it.

"Well, and what do you think of it all?" asked Bertha. "Is it true?"

"Perfectly true," said Miss Flemming.

"You really think——"

"I am sure—certain."

"Yes, on his part," suggested Bertha.

"And hers, too," answered Miss Flemming.

"Disgusting!" said Mrs. Brookster.

"Poor Waide!" said Mr. Brookster.

"'Fives,' Bertha dear. I'll have one pair of brown and one of slate."

Harry entered, and the conversation he heard had reference to Sultan, the Persian cat just then coiled in the harem of Miss Flemming's lap.

CHAPTER XXIX

AMONG HIS OLD MATES

ON the day following the return of Britton Lloyd from Wales, the whole of the Beckerton Hall family and Miss Flemming left for London—Mr. Brookster "on business," Mr. Harry to his "Parliamentary duties," and the ladies "for the winter season"; and on the following night a company of horse soldiers galloped, with drawn swords, into Beckerton, and through the principal streets—crowded with women imploring the men to go home and give the redcoats nothing for their journey. The men, however, shuffled the women off, murmured, and protested.

Off the redcoats went at a jingling, rustling, clanging highroad two-and-two trot towards Beckerton-on-Brow—all but one of the splendid straight-backed fellows, with their caps aslant, and their swords up, indulging in aside chuckles at the way the collier chaps scattered at Beckerton Market and up the High Street by the church.

The one exception was Dick Ockleshaw. He was mute. All the merry mutterings of his comrades went against the grain. He rode slackly; his legs did not press the sides of his black mare; and the sword leaned against his shoulder with only half of a grip down at the hilt.

He was thinking—thinking hard for him. What should he do if there was trouble—if they had to ride the dear old Beckerton boys down—perhaps fire—perhaps slash and hack—with his own father in the roughest gang of them all?

A sudden distant flare to the right showed in the darkness; the gaunt shaft-head of Camel Hump Pit, and the lit faces, like dots of flesh, of a restless mob; while in the pauses of an unfavourable wind the cheers and jeers of the mob came to Dick—not like the sounds of anybody's mob, but of

personal friends and kith and kin. Yes, they were like the shouts he himself used to help to give at elections, at pit-head meetings, and once at a burial squabble at All Souls' Church.

"Oh, dang their mischief!" he muttered, thinking still harder.

He did not hear the order from the officer in front to quicken the pace; and yet he, too, cantered more quickly forward, and the elevated glare of the increasing fire at the pit-head cast revealing gleams on the horses' brass gear, their black manes, and the silvery blades of the lifted swords.

"There's to be fun here," said Dick's fellow-horseman.

"By my Lord Harry there is!" said another in front; and at a call from the officer the canter was spurred into a gallop, the horses snorting with the extra physical delight, and the men passing from one to the other the mesmeric feeling that something was going to be done.

While they galloped forward they watched the pit-head framework develop in longitudinal and horizontal flames, lighting with unnatural light the mine offices, the canal and its bridges; and casting in unnatural flickers of light and shadow, distant isolated and elevated groups of men and women at Brookster's Yard, Brow Row, and Tip Head, sorrowfully watching the terrifying development of events in the little valley below.

Dick could tell by the change of cheers and jeers into violent booings and hootings, and by the random moving to and fro of the distant mob in dark and dotty miniature, and especially by a united stampede for the canal bridges, that the lads knew of the approach of the military.

"Pooh! They're off," muttered Dick's companion horseman. "They're all shout!"

"Are they?" growled Dick, knowing the Beckerton boys and the geography of the place. "They'll meet us at Road Ends."

"By my twopenny nut—you're right!" said his companion, as he saw that the colliers were describing one side of an angle, and they the other.

"Oh, ay. Poor lads!" said Dick.

A singing call came from the front. Swords were ordered in, and rifles were ordered out. Dick felt like slashing off his innocent mare's ear.

He sheathed his sword with an oath, left his rifle in its

leather case, and galloped on with his eye fixed on the massed shadows of two trees a hundred yards in advance on the left.

They reached the shadows just as they heard the colliers at Road Ends.

"Here goes!" muttered Dick, and with a deft backward swerve of his right leg as he freed the left from the stirrup, he lightly dismounted, gave his mare a parting smack to urge her forward without him, entered the shadows, pushed through the hedge, scampered across a field, and by a side-street entered Brookster's Yard.

All the folk were out of doors grouped on a bank watching events. Rifle-shots were heard. The women screamed. Dick came to the group as he swiftly entered the deserted kitchen, "Mother—Rachel—Sam—fayther——"

"Mercy on mothers' ears! If that's not our Dick, it's a mock voice!"

"Wheer?" asked Rachel, following her mother, followed again by Sam.

"I' th' mouth o' th' house, here, it had sound like. Hey, Dick, Dick, Dick, Dick——*Dick!* An' it's *thy* red set as has comed? Hey, Dick, Dick!"

"Now, mother—there's no time for Dickybirdin' an' huggin'! Hullo, Rache! an' Sam? How ista?—close the door—aw've run."

"Tha did reight, lad. God bless thee!" said Nance.

"Aw mun hide——!"

"Tha shall!"

"Wheer's dad?"

"Ay, *wheer!*" said Nance. "Aw can put two an' two together for the calkalatin' of *thy* run. Tha knew he'd be i' the crowd. Oh, wheer, wheer on th' earth mun aw hide thee, lad? Under bed? I' th' cupboard? Upstairs? Wheer? Wheer? Tha's so big an' long when it comes to hidin'. Aw wish thee wor a bairn."

"Mother," said Sam, "keep quiet; let us think."

"Ay," said Rachel, though too nervous to think.

"Tha may all think i' *thy* ways, an' aw'll think i' my own, which means if aw'm to be any good aw mun speak——"

"Tha's doin' tip-top at that, mother," said Dick. "But aw mun *hide*, an' *soon*. Wheer's gran'fayther? Aw mun get i'to his clothes."

"An' him i' thine?" asked Nance.

"No, no," said Sam, yet going to the door and calling in old Dan.

"It'll tak' a week o' Sundays to mak' grandfayther understand. He's as deaf as dough, he is now. *Gran'-fayther!*" called Nance at her highest pitch at the old man's ear, "*aw want to speak to thee!* But Sam, lad, for the mércy on us all, draw blinds down an' tell those folk outside to go to theer own doors, or we might hide Dick i' the bed-post itsen and yet hev him fund, wi' them givin' th' scent. Now, gran'fayther—listen! *Here's—our—Dick!* *Tha—sees—him?* Well, shak' him by the hand if thou wants to. *Now, then!—listen to me!—gran'fayther!*"

"Oh, mother," called Dick, unbuttoning his red vest, "thee an' Rache get upstairs wi' thee; Sam an' me will manage the old man. It's time, mother—time."

"Ay, come, mother," urged Rachel.

"But *can* they manage?" asked Nance, catching sight of the candle on the little round table in the middle of the kitchen. "Hey, Sam, lad, hasta no thought?—puttin' candle wheer it'll show all thy operations on th' blind like a Sunny-school magic-lantern! Tha may hev a head for findin', but aw doubt if tha arn't too honest for hidin'. Aw'll put candle here, see. And why i' th' name o' boltin' th' door afore the horse bolts, don't tha fasten door top an' bottom? My word, but, Dick, it's a picture to my eyes to see that tha's a comfortable bit o' clothin' about thy bonny broad chest." Dick, laughing, sat down to pull off his ridin'-boots. "Aw'd like some woolly stuff like yon for Sam. And warm hose tha has, aw see."

"Look here, little mother," said long Dick, leaping towards her in his stockings: "aw'll hev to *show* thee what aw want thee to do!"—and he lifted her shoulder high in his arms, carried her kicking and laughing upstairs, followed by Rache, lowered her into a bedroom chair, ran out, closed the door and tripped down to the kitchen; and forthwith Dick and Sam, but especially Dick, began to undress poor old mystified Dan, as if he were a horse, that had to be quickly stabled against its rather feeble will.

"Sam, lad," said Dick, busy, "but our mother's terrible *leight*. More leight nor she wor by a lot. Terrible, lad. Tha's all had hard times on it—but surely it's not bin *clem-min'* wi' thee?"

"Fairly on the edge——"

" Oh, them darned, grabby Brooksters ! Aw'd a-bin at home still mysen but for them an' theer grab. Aw couldn' an' wouldn' stand it. Now, gran'fayther, keep tha foot still. We on'y want to get thee to bed. Thee an' Rache, Sam, look white on it. Aw'll see the Brooksters i' hell's fire afore aw shoot on my own, or on my owd pals for *them* ! How's fayther keepin' ? "

" It's racked—him."

" Nay, lad ? Steady, owd horse—steady ! "

" But it has. You will see a change, Dick. That is why I tell you."

" Why, what's up wi' him ? But, Sam, lad, wheer's thy ' thee ' an' thy ' thy ' gotten to ? An' aw see tha's cut thy whisker different—a bit i' th' style o' town swells. Art ta courtin' ? "

" Lift up your leg, gran'fayther ! " called Sam. " We'll soon finish wi' thee now."

" By th' holy poker, Sam, lad, wheer's Garside's Kitty now ? Tha wor, i' thy quiet way, gatherin' honey theer. Hasta gotten past her ? Now, gran'fayther, up wi' thee i'to bed. An' whiles tha gatherin' thy breath aw'll show thee what *aw'll* do."

Dick very soon had the old man's clothes on, and Dick and Sam were briskly sandwiching the red clothes between the mattress and palliasse.

" Tha's not puttin' *them* under me ! " called Dan. " Tha'll be havin' me hetchin' some red feightin' cock."

" Then stop thy cluckin', owd bird, till th' hetch comes. Now, mother an' Rache, down wi' thee ! "

" Aw wor thinkin'," said Nance in alert readiness, more than half-way down the boarded-up stairs, " that if tha would feel surer, Dick, tha could get i'to our Rache's gowns."

" That's just the very thing they'd think on. Aw've gone seekin' th' deserter mysen, mother. No, no. If thee an' Rache will go about thy work and not quiz me as if aw wor that owd figure readin' newspaper at waxworks as we saw, Sam will be all right, aw know ; but it's women as squeaks an' squaws i' the wrong place. Now, aw'll sit here just like gran'fayther ; an', as aw see his face, is rayther dirty, aw'll mak' a nearer picture o' mine by a little o' thy valible coal-ash, and a tossle up o' my hair."

" An' what of thy sodger moustache, Dick ? Aw'd know it wor thine if it wor on th' table."

"Right, little mother. Bring thee a gran'fayther's blue 'kerchief, an aw'll have toothache, top an' bottom row."

"Hey, Dick, Dick! The same lad as iver. Here's a 'kerchief."

"Rache, lass," asked Dick, "has ta any fresh meat i' th' house?"

"Tha may as well ask, lad," said Nance, "if we've heaven on earth. Why, Dick?"

"Well, for one thing, mother, aw think thee could do wi' a little—nay, wi' a good deal; tha'rt thin enough for horse-racing."

"Hey, Dick, lad, aw've allus been pretty near the bone; aw'm one of those as can't coax flesh to cover what little there is o' me much. What's ta doin' wi' thysen?"

"Bring a basin o' wayter, an' aw'll show thee."

"Aw may hev lost a bit sin' aw see'd thee last—a big basin or a little un?"

"Big."

"But right's right; it tha has to lose it for right, then e'en *that's* right. Theer's wayter for thee."

Dick had punctured his thumb with his knife; and, dipping it into the water, the water became like weak claret.

"Dick? Tha's not mockin' Scriptur' wi' a miracle! Turnin' common wayter i'to wine?"

"Aw don't care what they tak' it for, if it'll convince 'em as aw've bin bleeding from teeth for me life."

"We had better unbolt the door, Dick," said Sam, doing so. "If they can't get in they'll suspect."

"Aw see tha's a general, Sam; an' now aw'm ready. Let come who comes, aw'm me gran'fayther—an' now, thee two women, go about as if tha believes me. Oh! this here own back grinder! 'twill turn me mad!"

"Feet!" whispered Nance. "Feet! feet!"

"If it wor two feet wi'out a body walkin' in, tha mus'na look an' whisper like that, mother," said Dick.

There was the strange sound of someone running into Brookster's Yard with only one clog on. The sound travelled with intermittent vividness to Ockleshaw's door, and Britton Lloyd, capless, fluttered in like a riddled battle-flag, with his left sleeve ripped, and blood running down it as if from a spout.

He sank in the nearest chair. Rachel only asked questions ; but Nance and Sam in a moment had Britton's jacket off, and his shirt sleeve up.

The bullet had run up the fleshy side of the arm like a plough, leaving a rough raw furrow there, and had glided off at the elbow.

At the sight of that Rachel gripped her hands, and then cast her arms about Britton's neck ; but Nance said, " Get thee away, lass ; it's no time for courtin' now," as she and Sam carried out the instructions of cool soldier Dick, who, still in the character of old Dan in the chair, ordered them to bandage the arm tightly all the way up, and give the lad six glasses of brandy, at which Britton Lloyd tried hard to make a full laugh out of only half of a smile.

" Did tha see anythin' o' th' fayther ? " asked Nance.

" I heard him," feebly answered Britton.

" Shoutin' an' bawlin' to th' danger, aw suppose ? Aw know him."

" Him and others was after a bare-back soldier horse last I saw of him, and horse leap the canal as if it was only street channel."

Nance went to the nail where her shawl was. But Sam took hold of the shawl, saying :

" Stay where you are. What could you do ? "

" Aw could show him a bit o' sense, an' bring him home."

" It's of no use," said Sam.

" None," remarked Rachel. " Stay wheer tha art, mother. Haply *he'll* want bandagin' next. How arta, Britton, lad ? Aw'll run for doctor."

Britton shook his head.

" Then thee come to one ! "

" Ay, Britton, love, go wi' Rache. We've done all *we* can, but it mayna be enough."

Britton rose.

" Thee stop here, Sam," remarked Nance, as she followed Britton and Rachel to the door.

After they had gone she stood on the step, drew the door towards her, and gazed through the immediate darkness to the distant atmospheric glow, where gusts of wind were blowing into red fitful life the smouldering timbers of Camel Hump Pit bank ; and as she gazed she listened.

The wild, passionate, and ironical howlings of men who

were exasperated by the injuries of others came up from the dark dip of the little vale.

Nance tried to catch the sound of Ned's individual howl. She did not care how wild it was, if it were only there ; but it was like trying to distinguish the sound of an individual wave in a tempestuous sea.

Taking off her apron, she twisted it about her head, for snow was falling, and she ran.

Hearing the growls and hootings of the men, Sam went to the door. He called "Mother!" into the darkness of deserted Brookster's Yard. But there was no reply. She had gone in search. He shook his head in the bitterest sorrow. Then the sounds of horses' hoofs mounting one of the black banks between the houses of Beckerton-Beyond-Brow and the canal thrilled him. He trembled, and returned indoors whispering :

"They're not far off, Dick. . . . In God's name don't make a fight of it, lad, if they do come!"

"They mun find me first."

"But you'll have to go some time. They're sure to run you down."

"Aw don't care! They mun court-martial me and give me a month's hard, aw'll be quite satisfied to get out o' raisin' my hands agen my own mates—that's all. Aw wouldn' desert an' think o' turnin' collier if—hoop-la!"

Sam put up his hand.

Dick grinned and mimicked a most terrible attack of toothache.

They listened to the tramp, tramp of five men, and to the orders :

"Halt!"

"Right-about-face."

"Fall in to the left."

"Shoulder arms!"

One of the five soldiers entered the cottage.

"You have a deserter here," he said to Sam, and yet ignoring him, briskly going to the bed.

He turned down the clothes from Dan, who was fast asleep ; looked twice at the old man to see that he really was old ; passed from the bed towards the little round table just as Dick gave a well-timed moan and delivered into the basin a pumping of blood newly sucked from his thumb.

"Bad, mate?" incidentally remarked the soldier, as he looked more at the basin than at Dick.

Dick replied with such a realistic stoop of agony that the soldier passed round by the cupboard on the other side of the fireplace, opened it, looked under the long table by the window, gazed suspiciously at Sam, but was quite satisfied when his second inspection confirmed the fact that Sam had fair hair and a real beard.

He then went upstairs.

His tramp, tramp, and the tinkle of his spurs and the trailing of his sword, were heard going from room to room; they were heard coming down the stairs; they were both heard and seen going into the back-kitchen, out of it again, and straight across the kitchen to the front-door—and away the five soldiers marched.

Sam closed the door and clapped his hands, whereupon Dick arose, put the basin of water on the hob, gripped the little round table by its pillar, put it under his arm like a gun carried at ease, and with handkerchief still about his head and old Dan's trousers three inches short, he paced the floor in grand military style, even though Sam warned him to sit still; even though Nance came in, still seeking Ned; even though she implored him to go back to his chair, in case the soldiers whom she had met should return.

To and fro he paced, from the fireplace to the stairs, and from the stairs to the fireplace, even though Rachel and Britton returned with Britton's arm tightly bandaged from wrist to the elbow. On, on, he marched, adding new grotesqueness by whistling "The girl I left behind me."

All but Nance laughed; and because she didn't, Dick, as he passed her, firmly caught her up with the other arm; and with the little toy-like table on the left and his little doll-like mother on the right, and with more of the military air than ever, he marched towards the stairs.

On the return journey, however, both Sam and Rachel saw tears running down the little woman's face.

"Don't, Dick, lad; mother's frettin'," appealed Rachel—"her's thinkin' o' fayther, aw know."

Dick, like Sam, heard the sound of a crowd entering Brookster's Yard. He suddenly put down Nance, placed the table and basin in position, and sat in well-affected torture again.

"Aw'm ready," he called; "let 'em in."

Sam waited for a military knock. But the latch was lightly lifted, the door was very gently opened, there were sympathetic whispers of women and men, soft, snow-muffled shufflings of clogs on tiptoe, and a collier-voice whispered, "Sam!—here, lad!"

Nance screamed as she had never screamed in her life; and rushed past Sam as she had never rushed before.

Her Ned was on a stretcher, white with snow, black with powder, and yellow with death. Nance called, "Ned—Ned—Ned!" but he did not hear. He had been shot dead; and as they lifted him in, larger and faster snowflakes fell like the phantoms of Nance's larger and faster tears of the first lone moments of widowhood.

In those same moments Mr. and Mrs. Brookster, Harry and Miss Flemming, Bertha and a Major Kelsall, were in a private box, laughing over a farcical comedy at a theatre in the Strand.

* * * * *

Three days later Sam received a postcard which looked as if it had passed through two or three hands to be written and a dozen hands to be posted. It simply said: "A month, hard. Dick. Don't tell mother;" and Sam crushed the card into his pocket with the sensations of a righteous thief.

CHAPTER XXX

THE THREAT

AFFAIRS were now more than desperate at Beckerton and Beckerton-beyond-Brow; in some cases more than horrible, with death and madness in the homes and terror in the streets.

The military had scared the frightened, roused the daring, and insulted the enduring. The early long, dark nights were more dreaded. Darkness was a veil under which anything might happen from a theft to a fire, from a murder to a riot; and many a woman and man, both old and young, followed the Salvation Army to its barracks, or grouped around the colliers' brass band playing

"Lead, kindly Light," simply to get rest from their own thoughts.

On the night after the funeral of Ned Ockleshaw, one of the listeners to the colliers' band was Rachel, with a little shawl over her head pinned under her chin, the pale oval face looking out of a frame like the face of a pitifully-grieving Madonna. She had been away from home for four hours, and Nance, Britton Lloyd, with his arm in a sling, Grace Waide, and even Sam, were out in different directions looking for her.

Nance's intuitions took her secretly to the asylum three miles away; but they were wrong. Grace's own touched feelings and a sympathetic reading of Rachel's took her in the direction of the subdued aerial rendering of "Lead, kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom" a few streets away.

By the gleam from a shop-window Grace saw Rachel with tears upon tears flowing down her immovable white face like clear crystal drips down an icicled wall in the light and play of sunbeams. Grace, seeing that Rachel was safe, did not break the spell of music that was as fervent as prayer—nay, indeed, was prayer, in the familiar words which some of the listeners murmured low in humming unison with the band.

But when Grace next looked across the group, Rachel had gone. Just then, indeed, she was flying on tip-toe, in her stockings, down the Black Ribbon path towards the canal bridge. With her shawl unpinned and held stretched to its widest extent behind her head by her bare arms, she sped over the little bridge like a great bat, now and then leaping wildly over imaginary obstacles with imaginary grief and imaginary joy, to no sound but the whispering of her loosened long hair against the breeze.

Words had no currency in the world of her illusion. Even direct thoughts had not. What impelled her forward were fancies—reflexes of previous thoughts—fairies of forgotten moods. She had no present or future, only a past, and that past to all else but Rachel was obsolete. That beautiful, clear frosty night knew it not; nor did the moon rising over Camel Hump banks; nor did No. 2 shaft, silent and still for so many eventful weeks. But to Rachel the shaft was at work, the moon was the sun,

and that night was the morning when she stealthily rose, saw Sam troubled-looking in bed, slyly left the house, and was overtaken by Britton Lloyd on the way to work.

Even the locked wicket-gate at the foot of the narrow black boarded-in steps leading to the iron platform did not bring her from the past. She crept under a familiar broken rail and mounted the platform.

Up there, only Rachel and the large, low, golden moon seemed to be out on the still, silent night; nevertheless, to her the colliery was working, the pit-brow girls were with her, Britton was in the mine away under the little wood that was no bigger than the moon which backed the wood like a golden salver hanging on the blue wall of the frosty night.

Untying her clogs from about her waist, she put them on; then the iron on the clogs and the iron of the platform knew each other like glib old friends, and made the only sound in all that silent world between the shaft and the stars.

It mattered not to Rachel that the pit-mouth had its guards closed like a drawbridge and that there were no trucks; to and fro she pattered in her clogs through the detail of work, like some iron-shod pit-brow witch in mid-air, though a couple of drowsy policemen, sluggishly playing cards in a hut to keep themselves awake, the distant pattering tapping of her clogs was only like the lulling faintness of rain tripping with liquid feet upon their iron roof, and they did not heed.

When the moon had risen above the distant little wood and was paler for the effort, another witch-like figure, but taller, more delicate, more eager, appeared on the platform.

It was Grace.

She ran to Rachel.

Grace's sudden greeting and affectionate relief roused Rachel out of those immediate illusions into others—and more passionate ones.

She took hold of Grace's embracing arms, and flung them from her as if they were loose sticks. Then she shouted, trembling:

“Tha wanna foil *me* wi' thy lovin', my Vicary lass!”

To Grace the words were blows. She was confounded; and suddenly stood afraid.

"An' tha munna foil *him* o'er-much. If *he's* too love-gone to tackle thee, an' if my own muther's afeared o' hurtin' him an' afeared o' hurting thee, aw'll tackle thee mysen—by the Lord, aw will!"

Afraid even to turn away, Grace stood helpless. Her trembling knees seemed part of the conspiracy of Providence to place her in the wild girl's power. She murmured like an abandoned child. If she could but get free of this, and all connected with it—and have done with it! In a moment there came a defiance for self-defence. She stood like a warrior-statue suddenly endowed with will to act to the fulness of its ideal strength. It was quite a new world of animal passion for tender Grace, wherein Christian gentleness by a few breaths of fear had become pagan, heathen, brutish. . . . And yet at that very moment Christian gentleness shed the keenest and bitterest tears of pitying sorrow down Grace's firm face that it had ever shed from her before.

"Rachel, dear girl!" she cried, "Rachel dear——"

"Why don't tha speak out like yon to him!" shrieked Rachel. "If tha mean owt, *mean* it; if tha doan't, doan't; an' keep off lookin' it! By yon sun i' th' dark theer, my miss, if tha leaves our Sam and our owd 'ooman harmed in so much as th' skin, to say nowt o' th' heart——"

"Harmed, Rachel? Rachel, lass—oh, Rachel dear!"

"If tha leaves him harmed as th' lad canna abide hissen, nor us, nor owt, tha'll pay for it. Aw know!" called Rachel, staring, and with her eyebrows strangely grayed with hoar-frost, "aw know! Tha's won him o'er; he's not ours; he's not hissen's; he's mopin'; an' if tha dunna leave him as tha fund him, tha'll hev Rache to deal wi'—Rache Ockleshaw as lives i' Brookster's Yard. Aw s'pose tha hasna 'eard tell on Brookster's Yard?"

"You cannot know who I am, Rachel. I'm Grace Waide."

"Thee mind whether aw know," called the strained voice. "By the God i' tha fayther's church, if tha leaves our Sam harmed, an' my muther, an' me, an' Britton, an my fayther in his grave, as thy fayther on'y seem'd too

glad to bury, tha'll hev to reckon hard wi' Rache Ockleshaw o' Brookster's Yard—number five ; tick it down i' case tha forgets—for aw'll hev a mem'ry like Britton Lloyd's tree wi' a cut heart in its hide o'er theer in Watch Witch Wood."

Grace appealed :

"Go with me to Sam now. Come home ; I'll take you."

"Home, home ! On'y for thee," said Rachel, with a voice less like the high-pitched strain of illusion—"on'y for thee, strike wouldna hev gone on. It wor thee as talked our Sam o'er."

"No, Rachel, no."

"Thee !"

"No, no, no. Look. Listen, Rachel, dear girl."

Rachel slowly looked down at her own torn skirt, then around to the black timbers of the platform, and then up at the stars. Her figure itself appeared as if reason had returned to it. She sped inquiringly towards Grace, and turned poor Grace, submitting and anxious, to the moonlight.

Rachel, with a sobbing cry of sanity, fell upon Grace's breast, saying :

"Aw see'd thee a minit back by 'Lead, kindly Light,' miss ! Wheer's this place ? Oh, take me whoam—tak' me to muther. Aw'm fair dead for muther an' whoam !"

Grace, with quite a new and ominous passionate phase of personal life opened before her, carried out Rachel's wish—and forthwith to weeping Nance and anxious Britton Lloyd, Grace was now frankly a heroine, deeper in their gratitude, higher in their veneration, than she or any other creature had ever been before.

Sam struggled to check his gratitude ; and as he heard Grace's praises frankly sung, he with set purpose tried to damp down the secret fires of his admiration. He sadly felt the way emotions were more and more tending. He was afraid, he was abashed. After she had gone, he strove to view her as a vague impression ; as a quiet, exclusive daughter of an unfamiliar Vicar in the days before she began to bring the hints of culture, superior dress, more dainty hands, more gentle manners, and a haunting tenderness, to the rough folk in Brookster's Yard.

But he could not go far back enough to escape her. Even as the schoolgirl returning from Beckerton with her green-baize bag, her wide straw-hat, her smile that in its innocence knew no caste, he used to meet her with a pleasure too young to know itself then ; and passed her with a pain that was too young to tell him all the truth.

Only now was he old enough to fully know that pleasure, and that pain ; and the truth of it all. Only now could he fully see that just because he was below her, and just because she was above him, then, as now, she drew him like a spell towards something better.

He knew that much too fully now. The knowledge taught him the distinctions with ironical keenness. He was dogged by comparisons—the Vicarage and Brookster's Yard ; his mother, his sister, and her ; his speech and hers ; his manner and hers. He shrank with the impatience of revolt. Everything was a load. He brooded. A patriotic egotism roused him. His brave little mother, his honest, hard-working sister, were as good as anybody. What was a vicarage ? Bricks and mortar. What a vicar's daughter ? Flesh and blood. All were flesh and blood. . . . Ay, but there was flesh and flesh—some fine, some coarse. But chiefly coarse or fine on the surface. Society makes most of the surface ; it makes some too fine, and some too coarse. Society had done that with her and with him ; and society, society, cruel, remorseless, selfish society, would have its murderous way. Life did not seem worthy of the Divine breath to him. The shadow of a big despair over the prospects of all mankind made him sad, weary of all action and thought, impatient with all emotion. . . . And yet forthwith emotion rose into an exalted passion for justice, sincerity, truth, right, love. Humble labour should not henceforth be misjudged ; the very noblest feelings of the soul as between one being and another should not be sneered into fruitless subjection by the ignorance of his own poor, the knowledge of her rich, or the stereotyped ways of the whole world. He would not give the lie to the highest and best that was in him for devil or man.

That was at midnight, when labour, love, and life could be viewed in the abstract—perchance because they were asleep.

In the morning he found them awake and extremely concrete in the marked personality of his talkative mother and moody Rachel and all the humiliating comparisons began to work again, but with more and more force and effect.

* * * * *

It was late when Grace journeyed homeward after taking Rachel to Brookster's Yard. She suddenly reflected that, as the Ockleshaws were anxious about Rachel, so her father would be anxious about her. She was sorry. Moreover, she felt the want of some harbourage in the increasing stress of her situation, for Rachel had frightened her. When she saw her father at the door with his hat and coat on, as if he had been awaiting her a long time, she hastened to him. She very affectionately expressed her regret, and embraced him as fully as his stiff manner would allow.

He closed the door, and bolted it with loud force, as if to make up for the long silence and the lost time. The severity of all this tortured her. Following him up the hall, however, Grace good-naturedly explained about the wandering of Rachel Ockleshaw after the funeral. He hardly listened, and lit his candle in an impatient way.

"It is getting worse and worse," he said, after she had stepped upon the stairs with her light.

Grace began her ascent. She could not speak. He waited at the foot of the stairs to hear her door closed; and then began his own slow, meditative upward journey to his room.

Grace sat by a little table, bewildered, too absorbed to draw down her blind, and the moon that had risen upon her and Rachel now cast her shadow, the shape of a dark heart, upon the floor.

Her eyes were with the stars; her thoughts were with the earth. Her heart was breaking with the conflict of different loves.

Why was she born in that house? Why not in some cottage in Brow Head, Rose Row, Bank Lane—anywhere but in that isolated, proud, lonely Vicarage, the prejudiced half-way house between the rich and the poor, with its

face to Beckerton Hall, and its back to Brookster's Yard? Nay, why could she not have been born on one of those far-off worlds—without parents, without troubles!

Tears gushed, and her head dropped like a fiery meteor upon her palms. Without parents? She was without parents then. She was orphaned. That proud, exclusive, haughty creature of her memory, the mother of her girlhood, was not the mother of her womanhood, Nor was her father the father of her heart and soul. Nay, not even of her body, for her arms had taken on the obstinate stiff feeling of his own when she approached him at the door and in the hall. On the stairs his voice seemed to be that of another man. . . . Ay, she was alone, estranged. The old anchorage had gone, and she wanted new. . . . Nay, she had new anchorage already: she had her deepened conscience running parallel with pure currents of thoughts, sympathies, and convictions in the conscience of another, whose pale, eager, bearded face, with now soft and now resolute blue eyes, came to her through her hands—and yet all the world seemed to push between, calling, "You'll cast yourself away. You'll break your 'father's' heart!"

True, a father was a tender being to grieve. . . . But who was to blame? He was. He was in the wrong. She was almost sure that he now knew he was morally and spiritually in the wrong, but would not yield. Wrong, wrong—utterly wrong! . . . But there was still the impenetrable pity of it—the pathos of fact. She would have patience. She would wait. She could again try to persuade, again appeal . . . nay, if all failed, she could demand her freedom and take it. Her life was her own . . . Was it? . . . Not entirely. It was God's. It was Love's. It was, in the deepest and truest sense, the world's—and she swerved upon her knees at the chair, yielding, submissive, letting the Divine will have its own way with her own.

Looking up, she saw a brilliant star. It was perceptibly moving, and she thought of the wise men of the East following their star to the birthplace of the humble Messiah.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE DUTY OF THE CHURCH

ONE night in that week Mr. Waide and Mr. Rew were in the Vicarage study.

They were talking about an urgent suggestion, made almost like a demand by Mr. Rew (pressed forward by Grace), for the immediate opening of a soup-kitchen, and the use of a room in the Vicarage for the reception and distribution of clothes already arriving in bundles and boxes at Beckerton Station, care of Miss Waide and the Rev. Charles Rew, whose names were in a list in the newspapers.

Young and dark Mr. Rew faced aged and gray Mr. Waide with firmness. He now knew the right course, and meant to take it. He was subordinate and respectful; but the dark tan of his skin had a flushed tinge of orange in it, and that meant blood heat.

"I don't exactly deny the need for help, or for bringing the fight to a close, dear Rew," said the Vicar warmly, to clear Mr. Rew's mind of all possible suspicion that he did deny; then, with a lowered voice, as if he were afraid of his confession going up the chimney and off to the Bishop's Palace, or to the London house of the Brooksters, he continued: "Personally, I would. Personally. You understand. You know my situation. It's most awkward. Most embarrassing. Most trying. The Brooksters and Dawbairns, as you know, do so much for All Souls'. Privately, I think the Brooksters ought to give in now—they have held their own position as masters; they have recouped themselves for any possible losses on contracts—but it is not my place to say so. You understand. Then I saw the Dean on Thursday. He deprecates a policy of interference. So do I. The Church must think of its own friends. Then, again, the whole affair will surely come to an end on its own account soon. The Government has interfered; the owners and men's delegates meet to-day in London. No, Rew, we had better go on as we have been doing—and wait. It will blow over."

"Then, with all respect, Mr. Waide, I cannot agree. I hold precisely your own views; but I must act upon them. My own conviction is that the true Christian can hold no such silent compromise upon a question of right and wrong—that is, if he have a sincere allegiance to the Gospel he has taken up to *preach to all people.*"

Mr. Waide turned very pale.

"I am exceedingly sorry to go against you, Mr. Waide, but personally I cannot have one course of ethics for the individual and another course for the curate, the official."

"But, my dear Mr. Rew—ordination, ordination! You undertook to obey. There is the Church's inheritance; there are the traditions——"

"That is what I object to."

"Object to?"

"Object to, sir. Because, years ago, in a far more crude state of society, certain people made the Church an owner of property, an owner of land, a collector of taxes in the form of tithes, and turned it into a vast State corporation of powerful officials—because a crude state of society did that, are we, when society advances, to stand by the crude conscience of the past? Or are we to live, and move, and have a being in the active and progressive conscience of the present? Frankly, I, for one, never wish to put on a surplice again if it is to cloak my personal conception of Christian duty and justice. I would leave the Church first."

Mr. Waide was in a pitiable moral plight. Not a soul connected with All Souls'—not even Grace, or Dora, or Mr. Rew—knew the utmost depths of it. Even Mr. Rew, like Grace, still believed that in some inexplicable way the Vicar of All Souls' was at least true to himself, and to the Church's version of things. The version might be wrong, and hence he was wrong; but dear Mr. Waide was at least conscientious.

That, however, was precisely what Mr. Waide was not. The insidiously subtle laws of association which had been very practically influencing his physical life for thirty years were so woven into the daily fabric of his material existence, so knit into the acquired habits of both body and mind, that when the discouraged spirit did speak it only murmured—and even then it was muffled.

At that supreme moment with Mr. Rew, the spirit murmured in vain. Even then, quite against personal justice towards Mr. Rew, some of those rank old laws of association operated upon Mr. Waide, and with absolutely immoral obstinacy he insincerely said :

“ I am afraid, Mr. Rew, that you are setting your private judgment against the judgment of the Church.”

“ The judgment of the Church was at one time a private judgment, Mr. Waide. Every tradition of it began with some one man’s idea, which developed into the idea of the many.”

“ But what do you *want* ? ” abruptly asked Mr. Waide, trying to jerk Mr. Rew off the main track into a side one, where he might stumble.

“ A kitchen in connection with All Souls’, and a depot for the clothes,” perversely answered Mr. Rew.

“ You don’t understand. I mean, what do you want the Church as a Church to do—broadly speaking, man; not in connection with a local dispute ? ”

“ To be practical; to be literal; to strictly apply to the details of modern life, both for rich and poor, the principles of the New Testament and the morals of the Prayer-book; not to preach the Gospel broadly, so that any man may ride over its demands, but to interpret it with particulars for the practical guidance of one man’s moral relationship with another, even in the getting of coal, the selling of a loaf, the making of a ship or a house——”

“ You speak like a lad—a mere lad, Rew ! ”

But the curate continued :

“ Why, the Church does not offer up even the Lord’s Prayer with logic. Fancy being the mouthpiece of the Brooksters and Dawbairns, and saying, ‘ Give us this day our daily bread,’ when there are hundreds of others in their power who have not even stones that they can call their own. Contemptible ! I must speak out, Mr. Waide. I shall take my own course——”

Grace entered at a venture. She thought her presence might modify the possible warmth of Mr. Rew’s resolute attitude with her father, who she knew was already sorely distracted even with himself. But because of her entry Mr. Waide said, with an emphatic sternness for her as well as for Mr. Rew :

"You must do no such indiscretion in All Souls'—nor out of it! You understand?"

Mr. Rew did not exactly say, "I cannot promise," but a stiffening of his figure implied it, and his Vicar, with the tone of the master to the man, said:

"Then, we must come to an understanding—at once . . . I cannot trust your discretion. Indeed, you had better let me have in your resignation."

"Father? father!" cried Grace, approaching him.

With one more fight against his own sincerity, he declared, with an emphasis which was itself the lying cloak of a lie:

"I know what I am doing, child. I—mean—what—I—say! Go to your room, Grace."

Grace stood away, but did not go. Her duty was there.

"Very well, Mr. Waide," said Mr. Rew, pained by a situation he wished to close for the sake of Grace.

"No, no!" urged Grace, touching Mr. Rew's arm to draw him and her father together again. But Mr. Rew opened the study-door—and was gone.

"Leave me!" said her father, trembling. His eyes were bloodshot; his brow was flushed; one side of his face twitched. "It's nonsense!" he said—"nonsense!"

"But, father dear—"

"I say—leave me; go to your own room. Now—go—go—go, and don't worry!"

Grace at last saw a moral abyss too terrible for her to stay to behold. His voice, his manner, everything, told her that he did not believe his own words. He was sinning against God and man—against Mr. Rew—against her. She left his presence like a leaf whirled by the wind.

In the hall she heard a mighty "Hurrah!" travelling on the road. Divining the meaning of it, she sank upon the hall-seat, hid her face, and wept with joy. There was a thunderous thump at the door. She opened it.

"It's o'er—owd rate!"

"Thank God," muttered Grace—"oh, thank God!"

"Nay, thank *thee* an' th' likes o' thee. Now, lads, three cheers for owd rate!" They were given. "Three cheers for Fediration!" They were given with double force. "An' now—up with 'em!—three good uns for Mess Waide!"

With treble force they were given three times three.

Grace shook her head, hid her face, wrung her hands—yes, in her uncontrollable relief and delight, kissed her two hands to the delighted men.

“ Three cheers for Sam Ockleshaw ! ” they called.

Grace then felt inclined to both laugh and cry. At the sound of the cheers for Sam she very fleetly tripped down the hall, half-way up the stairs, then down again to take the good news to the study.

Her father was on his side on the floor, gripping his white beard in one hand, and her own red-lined Prayer-book in the others. He was in a fit.

* * * * *

Next day, though the Brooksters were not at home, Dora was with Grace. She travelled from London to help her, for Mr. Waide was very ill, unconscious, and unable to speak.

Two days later Mr. Harry arrived in Beckerton-beyond-Brow. He called at the Vicarage, and found his old friend the Vicar in a woefully-stricken state.

Harry called at the Vicarage every day, where there was the hushed feeling of a gathering crisis. That feeling spread ; so much so that, at the suggestion of Nance, Britton Lloyd called one day to ask how Mr. Waide was, and on the following day Rachel called.

Next day there was no call from Brookster's Yard. Grace was disappointed. There was a gap in that day's life. Though Harry called, there was still an unsatisfied feeling which she believed would that day be gratified by a call from Widow Nance herself.

Afternoon and night came and went, and there was still no visitor from Brookster's Yard. Unpleasant fancies visited Grace. Rachel haunted them, and she was afraid. The whole of Brookster's Yard, the whole of Beckerton and Beckerton-beyond-Brow, haunted them, asking if she were still equal to the Truth. The great labour struggle was over—was this silence, this separation, this appealing illness of her father, the beginning of the end of all that had grown out of the struggle for her ? A fretful, nervous solicitude dogged her thoughts. She wished to keep the

links connected, and sent Mr. Rew to ask if all at Ockleshaw's were well.

"All but Rachel and Sam," said Mr. Rew thoughtlessly.

"Then only Nance is well?"

"Sam, like everybody else, is fagged, that's all."

"And Rachel?"

"Queer. A bit strange. I don't like her look. She thought my knock at the door was yours."

Grace coloured, and quickly asked:

"And Nance?"

"Oh, the little woman, of course, sent you her love—and the genuine article, too. Good soul!"

Grace wished Mr. Rew to go. As if knowing it, he went.

* * * * *

Many were fagged and low, but few had the peculiar depression which Grace hourly felt. Sitting by her stricken father—physically so very present, mentally so very far away—she could not read, she could not always chat with devoted Dora, and she mused in a private world in which there was not one open thoroughfare where even her fancy could with freedom truly play. It could wander, meditate, picture, build, but with only the shades and shadows of thought.

Yes, the great labour lock-out was at last at an end; she mused, but her own lock-out was not—hers had yet to come to its final crisis with that father whose prostrate condition now appealed to her with a grief which at moments seemed like remorse for guilt. Had she been right, after all? Should she, for his sake, when he was better, suppress her new life, curb it, confine it, and conform? . . . No, no. It was not selfishness that urged her on. Selfishness would have urged her to be "content," "happy"; and she would have become one of the ten thousand compromising ones. God forbid. Conscience was at the helm of it all.

But what would happen when her father recovered? The old Brookster problem? No. That was settled. Her father was penitent—he was on her side—she was sure. That was visible on his face as it is visible on the face of the dead. Not the old problem, but the new.

Alas, there would be a new trouble when he recovered. What would he think—if—she—*did*?

Her heart dipped from under the thought to get away from it, her cheeks flushed, her hands met as if in the unconscious symbolism of the reality of a plighted troth of the most daring kind. Into her tearful blue eyes came the sunshine of bright dreams. . . . Then they clouded with realities and tears.

Though this terrible labour struggle was over like a storm, there were still its woeful wrecks. Was it possible that, in the judgment of the High Court of Heaven itself, her father was held guilty of having been one of the means—even indirect means—of the killing of Rachel's father and the wounding of poor Rachel's Britton Lloyd?

Her father moaned.

"Ah, Mr. Brookster—shame on you! But for your influence upon my father and your inconsiderate greed in dealings with others, the Vicarage surely would have had a true Vicar of Christ in it, and the home of Brookster's Yard would have had a contented, hard-working, master-loving miner in it; Nance would still have had her husband; Rachel and Sam still their father."

And yet . . . who could tell? . . . perhaps only for Mr. Brookster's acts, she, possibly, would not have been brought into such familiar contact with Brookster's Yard. . . . She might have been married to Harry. No, *no!* She might have continued to live in that strange, isolated and isolating social world which draws the beautiful veil of wealth between it and the ugly lives that chiefly help to make that wealth. She might have been shut off from the exquisite knowledge, the sympathetic, the romantic, yes, the tragic knowledge of one modest, noble life, which had for her an interest so deep that compared with it poor Harry's life was as the gilt edge only of the unopened sacred book of real and earnest existence. . . . For *ever* shut off from the knowledge of modest, noble life? Surely, surely not. What had come about now appeared inevitable under any conditions whatever. Lock-out or no lock-out, she would have come to know precisely what she knew now? Surely so. The new influence would have still been in Brookster's Yard, and she by *some* means would have been drawn there. . . . And yet poor dear

dad, when would he, too, understand? . . . Perchance he did so then. He looked as if he did, for the brow was not troubled, and the wrinkles were like the mere hints of their former depths. . . . But if he did not, as yet, she was sure that the Father of fathers did; and what He understood, all men, some day, would also come to understand.

And so Mr. Brookster, according to Harry, was about to retire on his laurels and his disgust? He would have no more to do with colliers and coal. He would pay himself out of the firm, and let Harry carry on the business alone or with a partner. And Harry had resolved to carry on the business more in accordance with the principles which he had learned from the lock-out. Wonderful. Well done, Harry. He had told her that himself. Poor Harry!

"Father dear, did you speak?"

No answer.

"Do you want anything?"

No answer.

"Dear dad! I'll free your arm a little. That's better. There."

Poor, poor dad. He looks grayer, paler, weaker. . . . Ah, Mr. Brookster, this is what you and others have made of him. Would to God he had never seen your face, or heard your voice, or known your home! There are such vile acts as taking twenty-five per cent. of soul from a man, even if it takes twenty-five or thirty years to do it; and that has been the act of you and your friends.

What disturbing news for dear Dora. To think that through the influence of Mr. Brookster in London, Mr. Rew has had the offer of a "fashionable church" in Kensington. That is to get him from All Souls' and out of the way of Dora. Of course it is. And Mr. Rew has had this offer because he has lately spoken too plainly at Beckerton.

Ah, when *will* the Church move forward, not in isolated instances, like that of Mr. Rew, but as a living whole, alive to the shadowing disasters of the day? When will the Church more clearly define the "wickedness" of the first sentence in the Prayer-book in the subtleties and detail of common life, and not in general terms behind which the wicked complacently continue in their self-righteous ways?

"Thou shalt not covet," "Thou shalt not steal," and "Thou shalt do no murder" are such general terms, whereas there is coveting another man's goods, there is stealing another man's possessions, by the meanest of worldly means, of which commercial morality and Church morality give a sort of ex-officio spiritual sanction; and there is murder committed without the knife, the gun, or the blow, but by the slow processes of poison and starvation in the sacred name of trade.

A movement at the bed again dispelled Grace's musing. Her father's face was a little contorted. He did not seem quite so unconscious, and his lips moved as if in sleep.

There was enough consciousness to allow him to think, but not enough will to allow him to act. His thoughts were in a mid-air existence like a starlit morning cloud between the sun and the moon, neither of the night or the day. Thought floated back to his early pre-University days. He re-dreamed his dreams of being ready, like Cranmer, Latimer, and Ridley, to suffer at the stake for the Truth. He re-lived through the subtle modification of his social views at Trinity College, Cambridge, where wealth counted for so much that it seemed to count for all. In half-conscious dreams he again passed through the revival of the martyr glow at the exalting moment of ordination. He was again a curate. He again felt the strange, the modifying, the silent yet persisting influence of his first vicar of high-breeding, whose boys went to church in lavender gloves and his daughter in lilac silk. He lived again through the silent, inactive social protest under which most of his curate days were spent. He was the young Vicar again; engaged, married, committed to a wife who hurt his yielding compromising feelings by her frank dislike of the disgusting working man, especially the working man's wife, and, above all, the working man's children. His semi-consciousness floated and danced against the light and the darkness of All Souls' Church—his eyes opened, but they were blank, save for the tears that came, like thoughts weeping.

Grace mourned for his unknown sorrow, wiped his eyes, turned away, and hid her face in violent compassion both for him and herself.

When she looked again he was very pale. He was not

at All Souls'—he was at the gate of heaven—at the throne of God—his soul in a dim evolution of pangs—and he moaned.

His moans became words, and he violently clasped his hands, muttering.

"I have offended against Thy holy laws. I have left undone those things which I ought to have done."

It was holy ground. Grace sank on her knees by the bed with her face hidden.

"And I have done those things which I ought *not* to have done, and—there—is—no—health—in—me. . . . But Thou, O Lord . . . but Thou . . . Thou, O Lord, have mercy upon me . . . *miserable* offender. Spare Thou them, O God, which confess their faults. . . ."

"Amen," muttered Grace, strangely wishing that both Mr. Brookster and Sam Ockleshaw were there to hear as she heard.

"Restore . . . restore Thou them that are penitent!"

"Amen, amen!" cried Grace, taking his hand into hers.

His lips moved, but no words came. In their place was a faint smile—as if through the veil of unconsciousness; and Grace rose and kissed him on the cheek. He was dead. The great lock-out had robbed her as it had robbed Sam. God have mercy on her father and on his!

CHAPTER XXXII

A DECISION

AT precisely half-past eleven o'clock at night, when Mr. Rew was sitting on the broken spring and the fixed ripples of the slackened American cloth of the armchair in the parlour of his semi-rural apartments, a gratifying revelation of the emotions came to him.

Part of the revelation came from within, part from outside, part from himself, part from Dora; but most of it from Grace.

At the mystical moment of the half-hour after eleven o'clock, Grace seemed to inform him by the tick of the clock, the whistle of the wind, the lonely muffled foot of

the passer-by on the thickening snow outside, that she was not his destiny; that he should fix all his thoughts upon Dora; give his perfectly willing inclinations free play in that direction; liberate his feelings from the bondage of a hopeless and impracticable ideal set before him by chance in the beautiful, admirable, but unfathomable daughter of his Vicar; in due course offer his heart in its affectionate entirety where it would be accepted, and—take the Kensington living.

Ay, the Kensington living and Dora! The curate rose from the creaking broken spring, with superfine emotions which appeared to seek some far-off ethereal upholstery to recline upon, for he fairly tripped on the tip-toes of very effeminate slippers to the closed door of the parlour; stood gazing at an angle of ninety-five degrees of rapture at a very new Piccadilly photograph of Dora on the wall; clasped his hands at the back of his head as if holding himself in; paced to a corner of the table, where he sat contemplating the bead forget-me-nots on the old-gold ground of his dangling slippers; felt as if the dear, sweet, winning little being whom he had in mind were affectionately warm even about his toes—and he dreamed dreams.

Suddenly, as if to get as near the fair realms of his amatory Arcadia as he possibly could, he paced the floor again. Then he cast himself at full length upon the excessively red, red roses of the hearthrug, where he marvelled that he had not arrived at such an inevitable, simple, and highly-satisfactory conclusion as to his course before.

“Dora . . . Dora . . . Dora,” he inwardly muttered in private rehearsal of the musical quality of the name. . . . “Grace . . . Grace . . .” Ah, that one-time supremely musical note was flat, out of key, leaving the half-sad, the half-gratifying feeling that his emotions were not as they once were, and never—never could be again.

Late though it was, he thought he heard a mystical sound: as if the photograph on the wall had moved. He glanced, listened, rose. He felt as if Dora were present. He felt as if she had just gone—and he stepped in front of the old pier glass and looked at himself like an appreciative artist at a masterpiece portrait of himself by his own hand; and wondered what the Brooksters would think of

him. Pooh! whatever they thought, no other combination in the world was possible to him.

* * * * *

Next morning there was a letter for Mr. Rew from Grace. She simply said that she wanted to see him. Usually she said why she wanted to see him. She was surely reticent with a purpose? He was a little uneasy. Was she going to exercise the old spell?

He went to the Vicarage soon after breakfast. The blinds were down. Jane, the maid, received him with tears. He knew that Mr. Waide was dead.

Grace met him in the hall; and at a bound, though he could not say so, he was hers in pity, in sympathy, in duty.

Dora joined them at this point, and yet he put the previous night's experience aside. Grace, and Grace only, was the centre of all action now. What did she want? What could he do? He would do anything!

She only wished him to attend to things—to see the doctor—to arrange matters; and with a firm, prolonged pressure of her hand upon his as he left, she thanked him gratefully in advance.

And yet on the day following the funeral of Mr. Waide, which took place in a whirl of sleet and snow, in All Souls' churchyard, a change of breeze came over Mr. Rew's emotions, and freshened them.

In the company of Grace, Dora, and Mr. Harry Brookster at tea at the Vicarage, now that affairs were over, though the shadow of grief was in various degrees still over them all, Mr. Rew began to mentally romance again.

At first the presence of Mr. Harry Brookster opposite Grace at the table opened up the old, old painful problem of Church and State; and yet, forsooth, the presence of Mr. Harry's beautifully girlish sister opposite to himself very soon closed it again.

Here was sweet little Dora rousing in him such resolutions of ardent feeling that now there could not be any doubt at all as to where love, slyly joyous even in the presence of Grace's grief, was leading him.

At the table he could look straight and unabashed at

poor Grace, on his left, and feel an affectionate pity for her, and wonder what would become of her after the Vicarage was left; but he could not glance even indirectly at Dora opposite without feeling nervous, palpitating, and most affectionate pity for—himself: the possibly rejected seeker of that sweet soul.

Why, if the same gracious little Dora only passed the commonplace bread-and-butter across to him, he felt the very confectionery of fine feelings handed over his way. If she took raspberry jam, he also took it for no other reason than to put his fore-finger into the ring handle of the glass dish where hers had been. Because she took sugar, he on that occasion broke his no-sugar rule, and sweetened life for that afternoon to precisely her degree. If she coughed, echoes of it tricked him into an amatory wish to cough, too, in precisely her key. If she smiled, he, behind the privacy of his black beard, tried to do so like she did. In love? He was in the most fiery blush of its bloom.

Indeed, he was quite sure that he . . . possibly the new Vicar at All Souls' . . . could not do the work he wanted to do, without her. With her, he would carry Grace's ideal out to the very letter!

Grace noted this and was pleased. Mr. Harry noted it, and was jealous. Between Dora and Grace there were the most subtly delicate interchanges of felicitous fancies—conveyed, surely, through the silvery mistletoe pattern of the diaper tea-cloth, for their eyes were absolutely afraid to meet.

Between Mr. Harry and Mr. Rew there was that attitude of the extremely private detective which is common between two young men who are not sure as to whether they would or would not amalgamate well, even as merely theoretical brothers-in-law.

Between Mr. Harry and thoughtful, tearful, yet cheerful Grace, there was a wide, rough, doubtful sea. In a quiet, reserved way he did his utmost to beat round towards her . . . but she was like a mist-enveloped light on a distant spray-swept coast, which, though known, seems foreign and alien for want of the one clear friendly gleam.

CHAPTER XXXIII

'TIS BETTER TO UNDERSTAND

A FEW weeks later it was definitely understood that Mr. Rew succeeded to the living of All Souls'.

Something else was also understood—understood so well that without a word both Mr. Rew and Dora, for the sake of Grace, held their own opening-up prospects in check, ordered them back, commanded them to wait, until Grace's season of sorrow had passed.

It passed slowly, and the old associations with the Brookster's seemed, by force of fate, to be again gradually closing in about her life. Mrs. Brookster and Bertha called almost daily. They were exceedingly kind. The past twenty weeks, indeed, might never have been; and the quick quiet marriage of Dora and Mr. Rew, the brief honeymoon in the Conway Valley, and the return to the Vicarage to suddenly transform Grace from a hostess into a guest there, brought Mrs. Brookster and Bertha about her more than before. It even brought Mr. Brookster and Harry.

During the day she was theirs. Only at night was she her own, and even then not as wholly as she wished. . . . But what would she ultimately do? Where would she go?

One evening Mr. Harry, Dora, and Grace were in the Vicarage parlour. Dora, feeling rather than seeing something unusually impatient in the close-lipped silence of her brother, together with an occasional twitch at his moustache, thought she would try an experiment to relieve him. She left him and Grace together.

Grace knew Harry's thoughts. She was sure that she almost knew the very words those pressed lips would say to her the first time they opened to speak.

He spoke; but not the least in the way he desired to; and the struggle to be at home in mere commonplace was so painful that at last Grace, though looking down, quite freely said:

"You want to say something serious to me, Harry?"

He almost denied it. He tried to be playful. But behind his humour was grim fear. Hers was the frankness of a woman who meant "No."

He said with an abrupt relapse into **the** most pitiful gloom :

"And I suppose I need not say it? I can—go?"

Grace was pained, almost annoyed. She said :

"Don't put it in that way. But it is better to quite understand."

"Well?"

"Well . . . it really cannot be."

"Why? . . . We have known each other so long. . . . I have always wished it."

"But there are two to wish, Harry. And you would not have me pretend?"

"N—o. But I have always thought of you——"

A faint expression of protest passed over Grace's brow, and she looked at him steadily as she said :

"Always, Harry?"

"Always."

"Not from what I understand," answered Grace, bending her head.

"Miss Flemming!" he replied, annoyed. "Has she told you, too?"

"She led me to understand . . . some time ago."

"That we were engaged?"

"That there was an understanding."

"Nothing of the kind."

"It made no difference, Harry, none whatever to me. It seemed to make a difference to her; she was happy, and I was glad."

"There was, and is, nothing of the kind, Grace."

Grace shook her bent head, meaning that she would not encourage what that warmth implied.

"You used to be—friendly," he said. "You remember."

"That was years ago. We were children. You yourself have changed in many ways since then, Harry."

"Not in that. The very reverse. But—you—think—that—you—have?"

She said with keener sympathy than ever, "It is better to quite understand;" and she stroked back her flossy skeins of hair, and sighed.

With new command added to the feeling of privilege of an old friend, and in ignorance of the private drawing-room talk about Grace at home, he ventured :

“ You have lately seen somebody else ? ”

Grace did not answer. Her face bent lower than ever. He saw the most exquisite colour rise into the shallows of her pallor, slowly make her face unfathomably deep, and as glowing as her hair. Ah, within that unfathomable colour of her cheeks, which he knew so well of old, was her secret, if she would only speak.

“ May I ask—is it anyone I know ? ”

Grace did not answer or look up ; and yet the unprotesting tender expression upon her parted lips encouraged him to continue :

“ I shall respect your confidence. . . . I have taken your answer. . . . I do not want to know for my own purposes. We are old friends.”

Still, Grace did not speak or move, but her blue eyes gazed downwards and aslant, as if seeing afar off the very subject of Harry's questions.

“ I would be happier to know,” appealed Harry.

The vision within her eyes went from them like sunshine off a mere, and there was the gloom of tears, though not tears themselves, in the darkened depths of her sunken eyes. She did not speak.

“ And you cannot even—trust me ? ”

Her full, free look of friendly reproach was a denial of that ; and yet she did not follow that look by a word.

“ I know it has nothing to do with me—now—but I am interested—nay, concerned.”

“ You need not be that.”

“ But I am.”

“ I think of going away . . . to London. But if I go or stay, there will be no need for concern, Harry, thank you.”

“ There is no understanding, then, with—with anybody in London ? ”

“ No.”

“ Or here ? ”

Grace did not reply. He said with more freedom :

“ If there is, is it anybody I know ? Oh, pardon me, but I *am* concerned.”

Though he had repeated that word, Grace continued silent. It was better. . . . She was sure he was sincere. But what could she say? And yet she was ashamed of the want of frankness that her silence seemed to have.

From the conflicting expressions on her face, Harry imagined that, for some reason, it was a prospective alliance she was ashamed of. He thought of all the eligible men he knew in the social rank proper for her, but could not fix upon one with whom his fastidious fancy could associate her. Indeed, this strike affair had absolutely spoiled her chances in those quarters. People freely said so. He himself was the only superior one who stood by her—and that in secret. He was sure that he was the only one in his own circle, with the exception of Dora, who really understood her. Hence, he concluded, the favoured one was “poor.” Who was it, then? She surely could not still be thinking of Mr. Rew! That was disgusting, and not like Grace at all. Was it somebody outside? Another curate? One in Beckerton proper? Whoever he was, and whatever he was, if she would only tell him, he would respect her confidence, be satisfied, and not trouble her again. That was all he wanted; and straight from these thoughts he said:

“Don’t be ashamed to tell me——”

“Ashamed?” she answered, with the noble pride in her own affairs visibly growing from within. “No, no, Harry. It is not that. You do not know me, or you would not imply such a thing.” With both hands, and with certain upward touches of pride, she again smoothed back her straying, fluffy, pale marigold hair, and continued: “That is one of the instances that prove how you fancy you understand me and do not. This is the kind of misinterpretation that threatens to always stand between us. You *will* forget that I still look at things from the point of view of the equal value of all labour, including the labour of the master.”

This mystified Harry. What had this to do with the subject?

“No one need be ashamed of any class of necessary work. Its necessity in the world makes it part of that world; what is part of the world is part of God’s law, and all parts are sacred to Him. I see you think that I am on my old,

old subject, Harry. But you hurt me just now, you know; not wilfully, I am sure, but it shows how far even yet we are from each other's lines of action. I know that you think this has nothing to do with our subject; but I assure you that it has. It goes to the very root of it. Oh, let me be frank! You follow me?"

"Y—es."

"Well, then, granting unity of spirit and character, what would there be to be ashamed of if I—even I—married, say, one of your humblest men? The very humblest?"

"But that's an extreme—it's out of the question—it never could be."

A smile of refutation lit her blue eyes even as she insisted.

"But, you see, from my point of view, Harry dear, there is no need to be 'ashamed.' Nay, rather, I would be proud to be the means of lifting up one of that class—understand me—not to a better kind of work, but to a better kind of life in connection with that work, however so-called humble or so-called mean, than to simply repeat the old, old kind of marriage with one's so-called equal or so-called superior, and fail to reach any justifying motive either in love or life."

Grace had said very much more than she intended. She impulsively lifted a book; but her cheeks were aglow with the after-thoughts of her words.

Harry perceived that there was truth not far off that warmth. He reflected. The manager at Beckerton was a bachelor; so was the chief clerk at the office; the district mine-inspector was a widower—was it possible that her strike work had brought her in contact with one of these? Poor Grace! Led by her principles, she was going to make some wretched sacrifice. She deserved something, far, far better. He was prompted to say more earnestly than he had said anything else that afternoon:

"It is not my place to ask more about what you do not wish to tell. All I want you to now understand is that I wish to be a true friend, whatever you do. Nay, I should like to help—help in any way I can. I do not know, of course, what your idea of your own future is, and I can only guess at possibilities. But should you settle in Beckerton-beyond-Brow . . . I shall do all I can, for your sake—your sake alone. You understand? Yes, yes; I know this may

be premature, but I want you to understand. . . . Any hopes of yours I can help to realize——”

Grace's face was hidden in her handkerchief.

Afraid of his practical sympathy just then, Grace rose ; and yet she looked very sympathetic as she said to him :

“ You are generous, you are good. You mean well, I know. . . . Pardon my saying it, dear Harry, but you are again mistaken—or, rather, you again see things from a point of view entirely different from mine, and I *must* tell you, if you don't mind—no, no, no ! I had better not. You will think me ungrateful ; you will think I am always complaining, always finding fault,” she said, taking one of his hands between both of hers. “ I am not really ungrateful. No, no. Thank you for your very kind thoughts—thank you—but——”

Their hands separated, and Grace shook her head, censuring herself for yet again approaching the subject she had decided to leave alone.

“ Well ? Tell me my fault. Please. I want to know.”

“ It is not a fault,” she said very gently ; “ it is only a want of—how can I put it ?—a want of direct and unprejudiced knowledge of others.”

“ What others ? ”

“ Those who— What I mean is this. You spoke of helping for *my* sake. Now, if you thoroughly knew someone that I know, really entering into his life as I have lately done, you would help him for his own. Oh, Harry, Harry ! the lives—the sometimes noble lives—that are hidden away under twenty-eight shillings a week ! ”

He twisted his brow, trying to hunt down that “ someone ” in her mind, with his. Not a manager ? Not even a clerk ? Some—good heavens ! Twenty-eight shillings a week ? Twenty-eight ? Twenty-eight ! 'Twas horrible to think of—for her !

“ Grace, I do earnestly hope you will not make some terrible mistake. Your sympathies may carry you too far——”

“ No, Harry, no ! ” She now answered freely. “ My only fear is they may not carry me far enough—that *I* may pause for the want of true courage to face the opinion of one's old friends and the world. Courage ? Courage indeed ! Why should I not *say* so ? I said I was not

ashamed ; nor am I. It is one of your own poorly-paid men, Harry."

He stepped backward.

He muttered, " Grace—Grace ! "

" You have lost respect for me ? "

" N—o."

" But you stood away from me."

" Well—I'm naturally surprised. I see more clearly what you mean—I have faith in your insight. But, really——"

" No more just now ! " appealed Grace most earnestly. " Are we still friends ? " and she held out her hand.

He took it. They could not speak—their hands parted—and he left.

In a moment Grace was seated at the table, her head was bent to her hands. She was in the shame and joy of love.

London now seemed to her a far-off village of dead things, and Beckerton-beyond-Brow the most vital city of living things in all the wonderful world.

* * * * *

And yet at that very instant of joy over the marvellous vitality of things, little Nance Ockleshaw stepped lightly upon her clogs across the sanded cottage floor, lightly closed the front and back doors, went to the foot of the stairs, and sent up a most urgent whisper of " Sam ! Sam ! "

He came down as if on the return echo of the whisper, and Nance, with tears trickling down her wrinkles, pointed to the kitchen-bed. Old Dan's panting face was like an ascetic monk's, while his long, thin form gave the slightly-moving quilt the look of an effigy breathing. She whispered :

" He wor wand'rin'. He's changed, isn't he, Sam ? "

Sam nodded.

" *Liz, owd woman,*" muttered old Dan, "*aw'm barn'd for pit agen.*"

Nance tugged Sam's sleeve, and stifled a sob with her apron.

" He's wi' his Liz," she said.

" *Is th' lamp trimmed, lass ?* "

“ Ay! Lamp o’ life! ” called Nance triumphantly from her grief.

“ *Is it day or night turn, lass?* ”

“ Unendin’ day! ” exclaimed Nance.

“ H—u—s—h, ” said Sam.

“ *Aw mun see th’ Mester,* ” muttered Dan.

“ Ay, the Mester o’ mesters, dear owd fayther! The Mester o’ mesters—the Mester on us *all*, lad; an’ it’ll be no cruel lock-out wi’ Him.”

Sam stepped nearer the bed, peeped at the tranquil, silent, breathless face, turned quickly away, and held his little mother, sobbing, closely to his side. In his pity he vowed to himself that he would keep her by him for ever; that he would never leave her, for woman or for man; for himself, or for success; for anybody or anything. Come and go what might, he would now keep to his lonely little mother, Nance, for the rest of her days.

CHAPTER XXXIV

COURAGE

You have seen the long pale yellow bud of the tiger-lily colour into deep orange as it daily lengthens towards the sun; and some hot noon, you have found it fully opened with its deepest flush, and curled back, as if in rapturous shame from the very warmth that had wooed it—but showing the glories of its inmost heart, nevertheless.

That was how the warmth of intense new feelings acted upon Grace Waide after her confession to Harry. She had opened her heart. Its profoundest secret was known. Harry did not speak of it; and yet almost all of Grace’s friends could read her thoughts now. They were in her look, her manner, her tone of voice. Now the blue of her eyes was dreamily dim, like a pearl that has been breathed upon; and now dreamily brilliant, as if the pearl had caught the light of a full moon.

Nevertheless, she had misgivings. All that was required was to be true—true to growth, true to tendency, true to Truth itself. Could she be true? . . . Only one thing was

certain : she would not be false, and enact the lie which the world would want her to enact with Harry.

Dora read this more clearly than anybody, but not a word passed.

Nance could read it vaguely like a far-off cloud. So could Rachel. So could Britton Lloyd. But even the faintest hint of a hint seemed to sicken and die at the mere idea of speech.

Britton was sometimes sorely tempted to approach the problem, as it affected him and Rachel, on the coping-stone of the canal-bridge ; but he always felt as if Rachel would seize him, shake half of his daring question back again, shrug him off, tell him to mind his own business—and then perhaps cry.

One windy March afternoon Britton Lloyd, who was on night-turn at Camel Hump Pit, found Nance in alone, sitting inactive before the fire. He greeted her with :

“ It is not many times of the year we find *you* resting, Missis Ockleshaw.”

“ Hey, Britton, Britton, love lad, aw rest like yon fire rests, an' that's by burnin'. Heart burns first, an' then th' head. Tak' thee th' owd fayther's cheer ; theer's no fear o' him disturbin' thee any more i' the flesh, lad. Aw wor so thick i' th' thinkin' o' th' quick an' th' dead, aw didna hear thee on th' stones—an' that's a wonner, for tha always seem loudy proud o' thy clogs. Hi me, Britton ! *sit* thee down. Rachel's off to Rasselton Mill, Her *would* go——”

“ Oh, missis ! ”

“ Aw begged an' aw prayed——”

“ 'Tis a uselessness of the most determined thing is that ! ” cried Britton with a Welsh accent, the more Welsh for its warmth. “ 'Tis enough to make me swear Sunday out of mind ! ”

“ Aw tow'd her tha'd be vex'd. But her wor calculatin' back-rent, an Sam's doctor's bill——”

“ But Sam is earnin' first-class moneys—now ! ”

“ Ay, *money*,” sighed Nance. “ Oh, ay, he gets money—money—*money*. But money's on'y a good thing when tha gets ev'rythin' else i'to th' bargain. It's a poor, poor thing when wi' all thy gold sov'rins thy face keeps as pale as a shillin' . . . ay, an' as smooth, worn, too—poor lad ! *Hasta 'ear'd owt ?* ”

"Rachel vex me terrible in this! *She* no needs to go and mill herself into slave for sake of rents that time will pay. My own lodgings woman is owe *fifteen* weeks of rents, and bakers and grocers, and *her* girl not go to any mills. No, indeed. Nor Rachel neether if I can help it, hang me. No!"

"Aw said tha'd be vexed, lad; but if tha's anythin' strong to say, Britton, love, say it to me an' get done wi' it afore tha sees her—her's as touchy as a sittin' hen of lately. But aifter all, her's done it for th' best. A lass has the poor makin's for a wife as can't turn her strength i'to rent and the like, if need comes—as need sometimes will."

"Well—'tis that in it. Still, I have no wishes for *my* wife to go to the mills. Home is home; I—eh . . . I just pass . . . Have you . . . Did you never some time notice, Missis Ockleshaw, a beauty of a chest of drawers, home-made, I think, real mahoganies, good polish, brass handles, two little drawers in the top and three big ones under, and handsome polish pillars to the sides, in that second-hands shop two doors by the Miners' Arms?"

"No, Britton, never. Why?"—and Nance looked down.

"I was just wonder in myself what you think of their worth. I almost price them as I come pass here now."

Nance winked at the oven-door very familiarly indeed and poked the fire.

"Ay, lad? Why? For what, lad?"

"Well, for the truth of it, Missis Ockleshaw, yesterday I see a house in Dora Street that is for letting; three-and-sixpente; kitchen and back-kitchen, two bedrooms, new papered, pleasant sityuation, with good length of tatoes garden at back——"

"And tha thinks it would suit thee and thine!" called Nance with a delightful ring of the frankest connubial encouragement.

"And suit *you* as well—suit the three of us—to the A1!"

"What's that? *Three* on us? Why three? . . . What's thy reckonin' for Sam—*tha's not 'eard'd owt?*"

Britton bit his lip. He was on awkward ground.

"Hey?" pointedly asked Nance. "Why didsta leave him out o' the reckonin'? Wouldsta hev him roost here all alone? Hey? *What wor tha thinkin' on?*"

Britton was mute.

"Aw dunna want to stop thy plans. Thee an' Rache house-make for thysens—unless tha's ear'd someut—as soon as tha likes. Aw'm ready, if aw on'y knew which way wind 'ud blow Sam. *Hasta 'ear'd owt?*"

Britton shook his head. Nance looked towards the door, and lowered her voice to something like the depth of her sadness.

"He's fair worried wi' someut. . . . Aw've got as aw'm fearsome o' seein' him wash th' black off his face when he comes whoam, theer's such a white paleness a-back o' th' dirt lately. Tell his mother, Britton, lad! —*has he said owt to thee?*"

"What do you think *about*—eh—missis?"

"About owt; owt, dear fellow, as 'ud put a bit o' colour i'to Sam's face if aw know'd how to bring it theer, poor lad! . . . Hasta 'ear'd him say owt agen his new work? Doesta think he likes o'erseerin'? Hasta 'ear'd o' him an' th' office at loggerhids, or owt like that?"

"If Sam isn't comfortable of himself with his promotions, what man in all the pits should be?"

"An' yet theer's someut somewheer an' somehow sin' strike's o'er. Someut's wearin' an' worritin'. He doesna say owt, or grummel, or mak' much o' little, or anythin' o' that sort. Aw wish he did . . . then aw might get at a hint as 'ud gi'e me the whole. It mak's me wish to Heaven as lock-out had niver bin, bringin' new things, new folk and new ways about; ay, an', God help us! takin' some of the owd uns away from us. Aw'm sure Britton, aw sit watchin' him at his bit o' meat till aw fret i'to a fever, for aw can see by his eyes that they're not wi' his mouth. A bit o' the best steak might just as well be cardboard for owt he seems to give it credit i' the way o' relish. An' aw darena speak, lad. *Tha* knows Sam. *Tha* mun as well touch a babby's right to its mother as touch our Sam's right to his moodies. But aw hev my suspicions—an' so hes thee—so has *all* on us—but we're all smotherin' i' th' one sack. . . . Hey, Sam, lad, aw'd move heaven an' earth to mak' thee real homesome an'

happy if aw on'y know'd which way tha own happiness wants to go. . . . Britton!" she appealed, with her apron up, "tha knows what aw'm meenin'—if tha hears owt o' him i' *that* line, come an' tell me; tell me—i' God's name, tell me! . . . If he wanted me to shift to t'other end o' the earth, aw'd do it."

' Britton promised that he would report at once; but days went by, and the only news he had to report was that Miss Waide was going to London.

Nance opened her eyelids as if they were button-holes sorely pressed by blue crystal buttons much too large.

"Lun'un? Lun'un?" she muttered, as she gladly saw Britton's coat-tails disappear. "Feightin' shy o' Becker-ton? Agen her wish? Maybe. Poor lass—shut out o' th' Vicarage as wor once her own home!" Nance brooded. She started like a bird, closed the front-door, locked it from the inside, pulled down the kitchen blind, washed herself with even more than her usual searching thoroughness, rehearsing through it all the one deep emotion which was fortifying her to go straight to Grace and get to know all.

In her widow's weeds she walked over the crackling crystals of the frozen snow, which had suddenly made black Beckerton-beyond-Brow somewhat deceptively clean for a few days; and woman though she was, and little though she was, Nance walked up the Vicarage steps with the feeling of St. Paul going to the temple.

And yet the moment Nance heard the distant bell respond to her tug, she wished she was at home "doin' Sam's room as she always did a Wednesdays i'stead o' rushin' aifter outside ventures o' fancy, as wor p'raps left better alone."

A cold, cold perspiration made dank her brow. As she stroked its chilly fever she said aloud:

"Aw canna do it! . . . Aw mun ask for *Mrs. Rew* . . . an' aw'll talk about Cousin Lizzie's man wantin' work. . . . Oh, Lord, Lord, do help a woman i' straits—if—Tha—please!"

The door was opened by the maid, who familiarly said:

"Well, Mrs. Ockleshaw?"

"Can aw see . . . Miss Waide, if tha please?"

Grace, pale, but smiling and beautiful in her very plain but deep black, suddenly appeared, saying :

"Of course you can, dear Nance. Come in. This way, into my little parlour."

And Grace generously placed a low wicker-chair for her opposite the fire, sympathetically selected a cushion for Nance's back, leaned over and asked the little dame if she was comfortable. Then, with affectionate familiarity, Grace knelt on the hearthrug facing the fire, and, with her hand on Nance's knee, warmly repeated her welcome. Nance could only sit mysteriously mute, with an exceedingly new, glossy pocket-handkerchief like a sheet of the deepest mourning paper crumpled in her hands, and stare at the flames of the fire magnified through the lenses of the tears upon her eyelids.

"You have been to the — churchyard, Nance?" remarked Grace, ringing the bell at the side, "and you have given me a call? I am so glad—so very glad."

Nance shook her head, meaning "No, no; not the churchyard." The maid entered, and Grace ordered tea.

As Jane left, Nance said :

"Hey, but, miss, tha munna trouble for me; aw'm straight from whoam; aw comed from dinner; aw'd rayther tha wouldn' put thasen to any new bother on the top o' seein' me; it's not as if aw could stay. Aw do wish tha'd tug yon bell again to save lass an' thasen th' trouble o' teain' for my sake on'y, when maybe kettle isn' boilin', and th' poor lass is i' th' middle of her aifternoon tidyin' at the back o' th' dinner. Aw know what it is."

Nance's protests were in vain. The tea came. Grace took Nance's black shawl off, passed a dainty miniature cup and saucer for Nance to take upon her knee, and then handed the frail bread and butter, asking :

"And are all well at Brookster's Yard?"

"All very well indeed, thank ye, miss. My sakes, but aw hev a head lately! What am aw sayin'? We're all well, thank ye, on'y—now see at that! Tha *mun* excuse this spill, Miss Grace; aw wor liftin' up thy coy cup wi' as much strength as if it wor one of our big breakfast uns. A good job it's on my gown, an' not on carpet;

an' theer's bread-an'-butter gone now ! Drat my clumsiness, aw'm all thumbs wi'out fingers to-day ! ”

“ Sit up to the table if you would prefer it, Nance ; have it in your usual way. ”

“ Thank thee kindly, miss, aw will ; aw'm not used to a lap tea—— ”

“ That is better for you. . . . Then, who is unwell ? ”

“ Nob'dy's exactly, i' th' way o' strict speakin' o' real fact as a doctor or most folk would think it, unwell, miss. He's working an' all that ; he's not complainin' ; he's not layin' up ; he's goin' about ; he's—hey, but this tea is a warm comfort Aw get mine at Meg Morton's, one-an'-ten, but aw—he goes to pit an' all that, tha knows. Now, aw do believe, Miss Grace, aw niver once thanked thee i' person face to face for the good word for him at headquarters as brought him th' rise. Aw've meant it, an' meant it ; but what wi' havin' my own troubles—hey, hey ! my poor Ned, an poor owd Dan—what wi' my own, an' considerin' thee i' thine—aw've often thowt o' thee—aw've often felt for thee—an 'aw know how busy tha's bin wi' all sorts o' changes as has stopped thee a-comin' ; but young Mrs. Rew hes bin—maybe her thanked thee wi' my thanks ? ”

“ Nay, do not thank me, dear Nance. I have heard of what has happened, and I only know that it came about through Mr. Harry. It was deserved, at any rate. ”

“ Well, yes, yes ; though he's a son o' my own body ; aw will say Sam's a deservin' lad. ”

Her lip quivered. She took some bread, but could not eat. Her blue eyes stared at the cream jug, and her hand crushed the black-bordered handkerchief. With effort she said, “ It's a pity he's a bit off heart, ” but could say no more.

Grace consolingly referred to his increased responsibilities at the pit, and the reaction after the strain of the lock-out. But she also could say no more. Nature herself seemed to turn modest, and to strike Grace dumb.

“ Heartburn *here* ” (and Nance touched her chest) “ is bad enough ; but he's heartburn i' th' brain, miss. Tha remembers my cousin Lizzie's man—Ted, as we called him ? ”

Grace nodded, disappointed.

"*He's out again!* Aw do wish, if it would fall i' thy way to speak to Mrs. Rew, to put a word to her brother for him. Ted's as good a ingine man as iver saw steam, aw believe; an' poor lass is most terrible hard put-to. Hers back i' rent an' shops. *Aw fret terrible when aw think on her, aw do;*" and upon those false pretences Nance very gratefully indeed delivered the inevitable tears into her shielding handkerchief, and, rising, she said; "My heart, but this lock-out's bin a sadness, miss!"

"Sit down, Nance. Please."

"To many an' many it has," continued Nance, resuming her seat; "but you an' me, miss, hev had biggest by half of anybody's grief, aw'm well sure. Aw s'pose tha wish tha'd niver 'ear'd on such a thing as coal and colliers?"

"Indeed, no, dear Nance. . . . Why, surely——"

"Aw hear tha's goin' to Lun'un. An' no wonner! Thy fayther—ay, thy poor fayther—for one thing . . . Is it true, now, Miss Grace, lass, it wor in some kind o' worritin' way that th' lock-out wor th' help o' th' death o' th' Vicar? Our Sam says so; but aw hope not; i' the same way as aw'd hope, if Providence could agen give me the chance, for another kind o' more natural close to a life nor my Ned had. Hey, hey! but th' Lord's luck is as strange in its way as a fork an' knife o' lightnin'—cuttin' all ways. Doesta think Sam is presumin' upon Providence to think as he does about hissen an' thy fayther, miss? Aw hope he is, for aw wouldn' like anythin' o' that sort to come betwix' our feelin's. Aw know that our Sam, in his quiet-in-th'-corner way, hes bin at the root o' the stickin' out o' the men, an' speakin' straight things to thee as maybe thy fayther got to hear on and turned badly with."

Grace sorrowfully stared as if her own sad thoughts had become objective, and were outside of her, floating; somewhere above Nance's head. She was thinking how if Sam were ungenerous, he could reverse the charge and blame her father for the disaster to his.

"Aw hope the lad's not to live on i' *that* blame?" and Nance rose as if on a sigh.

"No, no, no!" said Grace in a rippling triple negative; finishing it with an emphatic "No; certainly not. Don't go."

— “Then, *that'll* be good news. Nay, nay, aw'm forgettin' ; aw munna tell Sam as aw've bin to see *thee*, no more nor seein' th' Queen. Aw mun act dummy, cram full o' the sweetmeat o' language as aw darena speak e'en through my finger-ends or the corner o' my poor eye, i'less it slips out theer i' tears—an' them sort o' words, bless thee, aw must wrap up i' my han'kerchief from our Sam, lately. He seems to hev so many o' 'em hissien that he can't abide anybody else's. But *aw'll* let him know i' my own way, as aw've done wi' many an' many another thing. If tha wants th' poker to know good news, tha needn' tell th' poker if tha fears poker might jump i' th' fire an' burn itsen ; tha need on'y whisper to th' tongs, an' poker knows afore th' mornin'. Sam's th' poker, Rachel'll be th' tongs. Hey, dear, dear, but this here life's strange when tha comes to know it. It turns up with such queer twists. Aw'm my own son Sam's own mother, yet aw darena speak my inmost to him ; it's as if the Almighty Hissien blocks th' way, an' says, “Leave that to Me” ; an' tha *hes* to leave it, wond'rin' why th' Almighty tak's so long i' sayin' what tha could say i' two twos.”

“And perhaps spoil it,” Grace ventured, looking down, trembling within upon the loud crisis of her speech, and the silent crisis of her pause.

“Well, maybe !” answered Nance with an encouraging sigh, also looking down . . . “Maybe. Th' Almighty knows when, wheer, how, an' why to put His whisper i'to th' heart o' man—and woman ; doesn't He, love ? ”

Grace, as if the Almighty had there and then whispered to her through the burning bush of her own blush, wooingly wrapped her arms around Nance as around an elderly child, drew her quite near, and murmuringly kissed the huddling creature on the cheek ; and the two beings, like clouds that have met and become blended in rain, more closely embraced and wept. 'Twas as joyous rain upon the gladdened flowers of their feelings.

“Hey, but this hes bin worth th' waitin' for,” cried Nance to the confessional grating of her black-rimmed handkerchief between her face and Grace's breast. “Aw feel by thee, now, as tha'rt not goin' to Lun'un.”

“No,” said Grace, patting Nance's shoulder.

“An' aw may tell Rache ? ”

"If you wish."

"Anybody at all?"

"Anybody at all," replied Grace, adding more pressure to her embrace.

"Hey, Lord, aw feet like a thief i' th' night stealin' Esau's blessin'. Aw wish all Beckerton folk could feel thee speak the love o' thy heart through thy han's an' arms like this."

"I want to do more—much more."

"Ay, miss, tha munna tak' this from us to Lun'un. Stay among us. It 'ud be one o' th' best ways God could hev o' blessin' us—if aw may dare to think for Him a bit. But aw'm forgettin' time ; an time's forgettin' me. Aw *mun* go now—really—aw'm afear'd o' bein' caught out. Wheer's shawl, miss? Thank thee. Isna mcm'ry like a livin' thing? Aw niver put on this black shawl but what aw put on my Ned's an' thy fayther's fun'ral agen."

Nance moved towards the parlour door; then looking straight at Grace's reddened eyes through her own reddened ones, she said:

"Well—aw *may* say tha'rt *not* goin' to Lun'un?"

"You may, dear Nance—you may. How is Rachel? When is she to be married? I'd like to see her——"

"Th' time's on'y i' th' bud yet, miss. None on us seem ready. Sam mun be better afore then. Aw wish—— But grass mun wish to be hay, an' eggs to be chickens, an' yet be eaten up afore bein' anythin' o' th' kind i' this world. An' now, Miss Grace, if tha'll open door for me——"

And in a moment Nance was gone.

Back to the parlour Grace sped. She locked the door and sank kneeling at the wicker-chair as at the shrine of the pitiable, lovable little mother who had struggled so hard to speak and had failed—as she herself had failed.

Grace reproached herself. She had been sympathetic, but cowardly and weak. Her father had lacked courage to speak his truth; she lacked courage to speak hers. If all Truth were right, if all Love were right, why should she not have helped poor Nance to the very utmost of her speech?

Grace ran to the window. Nance was gone. The snow—silent, still, and white—was a shock to her new agitation and glow. She sat at her table and began to write—

rapidly—to Nance. She read over the few thick lines of frankness, tore them up, and cast them into the fire. It was all too sacred. She returned to her table, bent her head there, and wept to herself that which, to another being, Nature did not give her courage to fully say, or ever write.

CHAPTER XXXV

OVER THE STILE

NANCE was no sooner out of the Vicarage than she was as a partially dumb creature gifted with full speech. Frank eloquence was at last let loose. Instead of strong emotions checking it, they now lent force to every word. She walked quickly, inwardly speaking very plain things to Sam. She would speak them that very night. No longer could she endure the undermining of the home with some slow, smokeless, flameless explosive which no one had the courage to touch.

Sam came to tea ; and, alas, she trembled. Her heart thumped like an engine in the breast of a little steam-launch. While he was cleaning himself in the back-kitchen she went to and fro, from the plate-rack to the fireplace, from the fireplace to the front-door, giving her nerves activity and air—dusting this chair, fixing that ; fulling the pillow of his bed ; shaking the dust out of his velvet pit-cap ; and critically examining her own rich dense-black polish on his best boots tilted ready for his hand at the fender, to see that it was quite worthy of an affection just then brimming over in quenchless silent tears falling like heart-drops upon the homely purity of the burnished fender.

Quite as if she were at the Ebenezer mid-week meeting, she murmured to herself, and sat rocking in her chair with two hectic centres in her drawn eager cheeks.

Sam entered with something of the self-absorbed aloofness of a stranger, and passed moodily upstairs.

He came down in his Sunday black, in continuance of his acquired preference for fine cloth during the latter part of the strike.

The only sound in the place was the miniature steaming waterfall of tea poured out of a wide spout into a big cup by Nance. She extended her arm with the cup: and her balanced hand trembled half-way across the round table. He took hold of the saucer; but she could not yield it. She felt his slight tug; and yet she could not let go. It was as if she had him by the hand. In abrupt, desperate appeal she said:

"Sammy—Sammy, lad! arta goin' to go on growin' away from me—or what?"

Her hand withdrew, to allow her to turn away on her rocking-chair in the utmost grief, from her own words.

He put down the cup, and sat looking sideways at her bent form, with the petrifying stiff stubbornness of love ashamed to love. Blue rims visibly developed under his eyes. His lips quivered.

"Now, mother," he said, with a severe sort of abortive gentleness, "don't! . . . *I* have to bear and abide," which implied, "and you must—all must."

"Aw know tha hes, lad. . . . Leastways . . . aw can guess. What *is* wearin' thee, son? Out with it to *someone*! Pluck up! Thy wish'll be mine, lad."

He pushed the cup and saucer away from him. All appetite had gone, as if to make room for the greater beating of his heart.

"What *is* ailing thee ever sin——"

He rose, complaining, "It's been going; let it—go!"

"But, Sam, son, if tha *does* think on her——"

"In God's name, mother, none o' that! Let it go!" Then, with the first sign of animal fierceness that he had ever shown, he snatched up his cap.

"As tha wish, lad. Here! Dunna open door . . . let us keep our own to our own sens."

He cast down his cap. She gazed at his best boots at the fender, continuing:

"All aw want is the best for *thee*. Good, high, beautiful, humble, clever; but hers not a whit better nor thysen at thy best."

"Now, mother, that'll do! *I can't* stand it! Let it drop!" and he stood, as if that were the only condition upon which he would again take his seat.

"*Aw'll* not be always wi' thee, lad. . . . Thee think

well into th' future—thy future. . . . That's all aw want. . . . Aw want thee to hev thy *own* wish, an' for th' colour o' life to come back to thy face. . . . *Av'a* harkin' back—thinkin' o' me, an' Rache?"

He twisted away, fevered with impatience over every word of hers, and every breath of his own.

"All aw way is—*don't!* Think o' thasen."

A look of passionate obstinacy came into his figure.

"Well, there, son, aw've done. Tak' thy cheer. Get thy tea. Come! Aw've done—aw've freed mysen. Cake's goin' hard cold. Come, lad—come, now, do!"

He turned to the table and took his tea as if by deputy—by a second self. His primary self seemed far away; his mother seemed far away. He did not speak; he hardly thought, hardly even felt; and before he had taken his usual third cup his limbs were stretched towards the fender in the tranquil glow of the fairest fancies of Ifs. If he were only a success—something *worth* having—on the board of Federation—on the County Council. If (and the sun-rays of thought darted a momentary sparkle into his eyes)—ah, if he were a Labour Candidate—a *Labour M.P.*—a worker, a doer, a practical reformer of the cruder members of his own kind. If he were only fully himself, and not that half-and-half approximation which was somehow made to wait!

That was the calm of fancies before the storm of realities; for next day, and the next, Nance herself was more and more sorry that she had spoken. His dejection deepened. He was going over the revived struggle again; living it down, sombre and grim, with the isolating endurance of a being too proud to yield, too sensitive to be helped, too dogged in its own pet interpretation of what was best.

His will, his practical common-sense, would hardly let him dream of the theme. The new light was outside of the doomed range of his rough, dark life; far, far above the reach of his inevitable worldly rank; away, far away from that incomplete ambition of his crude self-education over which he at times had shed a strong man's tears because of the slow results of long laborious hours to learn even the meanings of new words which kept from him their secrets of new thought in his gropings and grindings through "Cobbett's Grammar," "Tod's Student's Manual,"

an odd second-hand volume iii. of "Hume's History," and an old copy of "Burke on the Sublime and Beautiful"—not three consecutive paragraphs of which discourse could he fully understand.

Ah, no. It could not be. Life itself had only half-lights for him. And yet part of that life was the secretly exalting experience of knowing a gleam of the better side of his own nature though the nature of a creature who was serenely above him.

Beyond that he could not let himself dream, for it was dreaming. The confirmed trouble seemed to finally settle into one of those accepted, inevitable household burdens which enter homes and doggedly haunt the mornings and nights with the realities of pangs, and the premature shadows of disaster and death.

Sam passed to and fro from pit to cottage, more than ever isolated with emotions which were daily wearing his frame from within.

It was not the formal declaration of a unique affection that troubled him. He had boldness for the mere mechanism of his feelings if only everything else were clear. What—what would follow after? What for *her*? for his mother? for Rachel and Britton Lloyd? for all those old associations which he could not, would not, let go?

Moreover, what for Mr. Harry Brookster? for whom there had recently warmed into his sympathies a sort of lovelorn pity.

Yes, granting realization for himself, what was there in it for them all? A social twist—which would put everybody upon the strain.

He wished he were absolutely indifferent—the old, old innocent, ignorant, untaught Sam. He hated strikes; he hated thought; he hated insight; he hated books. He wished he were still the boy who used to dream himself back into childhood under the biggest oak in Watch Witch Wood. Like a boy of an older growth, he wandered there again, fiercely trying to shut off all thoughts tending one way; and yet, forsooth, wondering what he would be like two years hence with more thought, more insight, more culture, more books.

Nance sometimes followed him to the wood, watching

behind trees at a distance—thankful when he passed homeward without harm; and the strange thing was that he could see her daily changing, growing haggard, keeping pace in silent trouble with him, and nevertheless endure it with a dogged belief that time would cure them both; that the cause of it would perhaps go away from Beckerton-beyond-Brow, and that Brookster's Yard would become its old self again.

But the strain was too severe. Work at the pits became a strife of every nerve, and rest at home was worse than work. Fits of trembling came over him at the shaft-mouth and in the pit-cage. They awoke him from sleep in bed, and he would rise in the dark earnestly wishing to God he had never been born to know of something that could not possibly be realized to the satisfaction of all.

One day he had to surrender, and go home.

The doctor told Nance that there was nothing organically wrong with the fellow. It was simply that he had something on his mind. That was all—nothing more. Something on his mind.

At Nance's request Mr. Rew visited Sam, and tried to get him to confide. But Sam's thoughts were like beautiful fossils of ferns locked in an upsplitted stone. He himself felt that even if he opened his heart the fossils would never be ferns again. He had pressed out the life, for everybody else's sake, and his own. And, that being so, he did not see why, by confessing, he should put himself on exhibition like some specimen in a museum.

Mr. Rew was cordial, he was severe, he was persuasive; but Sam was Sam—safe in his own silence, much to the sorrow of Nance, listening upstairs.

Then, unknown to Grace, Dora tried. But, with a slight modification in deference to her sex, Sam again pressed his lips, and shook his head. Even a daughter of Mr. Brookster should not lure him into weak confidences—and regrets.

Dora, however, was not discouraged. She spoke as if there were two separate funds of sympathy in her feelings as she urged: "Though I alone have come, I am not the only or the principal one who wishes you to confide;" and she saw a faint rosy colouring chase Sam's pallor

into the cover of his fair beard. "What is it that you really—wish?"

The colour disappeared like a flame blown out, and Sam's blue eyes slowly turned upon her as if asking, "Why, why do you pursue me?"

"Do tell me—please."

His raised hand clearly appealed, "Don't, don't; it would be of no use."

Dora could not look at him as she asked:

"Is it because you have not the right feeling?"

He was tempted to say, "Yes," to get rid of it in that way; but he would not send anything but the truth. He did not answer.

"Perhaps you think we are too proud to really interest ourselves?"

"I—do—not."

"Too——"

"I don't think anything against anybody. I could not. It would be wrong."

"Then—excuse my asking plainly—are *you* too proud?"

"Perhaps. . . . Oh, don't get me talking! No one can understand *all* my feelings, Mrs. Rew."

"She can."

"*How doesta know?*"

His own "How doesta" smote him. He cried out with the torture of shame, "Let's end it—end it! Once for all, end it!"

"Why, she——"

"Not a word more!"

"She speaks like that herself sometimes."

"Making fun."

"No, no; forgetting herself."

"I shouldn't like it."

"Grace likes it. She loves to hear your dear little mother——"

Sam coloured.

"And so do I, Sam."

He looked down at the sanded floor; he toyed with some of the golden sand with his foot. His mother's hand had strewn it there every day as far back as his long keen memory could go. "Ay," he mused, "poor little

mother! Father gone, old Dan gone, Dick as good as gone. . . .”

Dora guessed his thoughts, and said :

“ She won't be lonely with Britton Lloyd.”

“ Britton Lloyd? How? When?”

“ *Then!*” said Dora, and laughed with quite a roguish freedom.

Sam looked as if he were trying to read some stars of destiny visible to Mrs. Rew, but invisible to him.

“ Who thinks of that?”

“ We all do,” answered Dora, whose delight made her pat—“ all but you.”

“ All? How? When?”

“ When Britton Lloyd and Rachel are married.”

“ There's no talk of that——”

“ Oh yes, there is ; but . . . it depends upon—you.”

He was astounded.

“ You can hasten it, you can delay it, you can prevent it. It rests with you, and you only, to make them happy ; to make your dear, good, loving little mother happy ; Rachel and Britton happy.”

“ I ? ”

“ You. You are unhappy. Make yourself happy, and you will make them. Be frank, candid, truthful.”

“ Mrs. Rew ! ”

“ Oh, you are not so at present, you know. You have a secret ; you keep it from those good creatures who live with you, who love you, who would do anything for you. You have been trying to live a lie.”

He rose.

“ Oh yes, you have, and you cannot. That is why you are at home, ill ; and you are not brave, not even as brave as a woman, and a very gentle woman, too ; for one of the tenderest creatures in all the world has sent me here to-day.”

He stared, incredulous.

“ Well, not sent me exactly ; but I know her thoughts, I know her great trouble.”

He reflected. He bravely stood erect, looking a truly frank, candid, and noble Sam, fair and flushed.

“ That is better,” said Dora prematurely. “ You look happy already.”

"No!" he cried, twisting away.

"But you did."

"Ay, fool as I was—fool, fool!"

He stood like an awkward young pigeon in its first crisis of possible capture, fluttering between a pair of hands and a wall. He wanted to snatch himself out of space—and took flight up the first opening—up the stairs.

To his surprise, his little mother was on the landing.

"Hey, Sam, lad!" she said, and shook her head in motherly pity and a peculiar sort of sympathetic contempt as she passed her hero, heroic in the wrong way. "Mrs. Rew, love, one minit, if—tha—please!" called Nance, descending. "Tha'rt married. Tha knows all stages—all but mine i' th' widowhood—an' aw can speak to thee as woman to woman, an' wife to wife. Aw knows Sam. Aw know him better nor he knows hissen, an' allus did. As a babby he would tak' breast an' wouldn'. Aw allus had to fair force th' good things on 'im. He's a lass of a lad i' some ways—a fretfu' sort o' thinker on other folkse's minds i' pref'rence to his own. He'd eat nayther syrup nor dumplin' if he thowt dumplin' 'ud rayther hev syrup to itsen. He's tak'n as much bringin' up as a duck-brood o' Rachels an' Dicks would. Why, our Dick had two or three sweethearts i' th' flesh whiles Sam wor courtin' his on paper i' Dickens' an' some woman of a man's books he used to speak on called George Yelliot, till aw tell'd him he couldn' marry a paper lass. But that's Sam to this day, an' aw hav'n' a bit of doubt but if—now, Sam, howd tha noise up theer! Tha's hed thy say an' do; an' aw'll hev my say, an' do my do, now. Toot! aw'm ashamed o' thee! Tha a'must deserve to lose the very things tha want and could hev if tha had but half as much tongue i' thy mouth as brain i' thy head or love i' thy heart. Now hush wi' thee; aw'll on'y speak out what tha'rt all the time speakin' in. Aw hav'n' a bit o' doubt, Mrs. Rew, love, if someone as we know well wor i' some book i'stead of i' life, he'd be nursin' her in his hands, he'd be porin' o'er her on th' table, an' he'd be takin' her under his arm to some tree on Greigson's farm, an' e'en up to his pillow at night, and waste candle an' eyes on her; but because her's i' th' flesh—alive—worth th' havin'—lors-a-me! he runs upsteers from his own words. But aw won't.

Aw've run down to 'em. Thee go an' tak' everythin' as has happened, straight to wheer it's a right to go. Tha knows enough o' thysen to judge a lass, an' enough o' Mester Rew to judge a lad—act on tha own afore-an'-aifter-marriage judgments, Mrs. Rew, love. Reckon nowt on me an' Rachel an' Britton Lloyd—nowt on us. Us are goin' away to Woverton pits, thirty mile off——”

“ No, no——”

“ But we are. But that's i' th' back o' things yet. We've yet to clear th' front, an' i' God's good name, Mrs. Rew, if it's in thy judgment as it's i' mine, go wheer tha come'd from an' tell *all*. Aw'm not seekin' for my own sen's sake—the Almighty Hissen would be a witness o' that—but for the sake o' those two grown-up childer well-nigh in other people's arms i'stead o' their own, and as canna seek it for theirsens. Ay, away an' tell *all*.”

“ I will,” answered Dora, but moving towards the stairs; and Nance very solemnly twitched her face as she daringly said:

“ Gi'e Grace my real love—an' Sam's.”

Dora asked up the stairs:

“ Should I? ”

There was no answer.

“ Away wi' thee! ” said Nance, delighted. “ Aw knows Sam's silence—it gi'es consent.”

“ But it does not,” called Sam, hastening down.

“ Dunna foil thasen agen th' better wisdom o' thy better sen, lad! ”

“ He doesn't mean it,” said Mrs. Rew.

“ But aw do—aw must,” he answered in plain collier style with a purpose. “ Aw know my own cuttin' in life—an' it's coal. Aw know hers—an' it's th' lady's.”

As if in practical illustration of his argument, Grace appeared at the door in the beautiful superiority of a creature who was now quite equal to both the romance and the reality of her recent life.

She read the situation and halted—ready for anything.

Sam was mystically quelled. He was like a gnarled oak compelled at the height of a black storm to shine forth in the pallors of life and death by the play of lightning. But instead of thunder there was silence. . . . Lo, in an instant he regained his self-possession. Without a word

he selected his best felt hat from the pegs, and joined Grace at the door. There was the most perfect unity of action. As if by the result of the most careful drill, they both walked side by side out of Brookster's Yard and down the Black Ribbon path.

Nance and Mrs. Rew were astounded. Nance led the way, and they hastened upstairs. On tip-toe they watched the two from the bedroom window.

It was evident that Sam's influence was predominant. His step had will and direction; Grace's had uncertainty, anxiety, and yet a pathetic willingness to follow.

Nance and Mrs. Rew watched them descend the path, cross the canal bridge, and mount the slope towards Greigson's farm.

"Haply he's reight," muttered Nance. "He *may* know better nor us sep'rate folk outside him. *Haply* he's reight."

"What do you think of it?" anxiously asked Mrs. Rew.

"Sam's Sam, an' that's all aw ken—now. He hes a way o' Providence of his own. The ducklin' swims and leaves th' owd hen to cluck an' claw on th' marge. Whate'er he does, aw mun believe he's reight, wi' more knowledge nor mine. Aw'm behind date wi' him. Aw'm more his gran'mother nor his own mother now. Aw'm done guessin'. Whatever is for him, will be is for me. Hey, Mrs. Rew! when tha has a son o' thy own, tha'll know th' motherness o' th' feelin' aw mean. Reight or left, yes or no—God bless him! An' if th' Almighty has the feelin' of a mother as well as a fayther, He *will*; or aw'll want to know what's what on Judgment Day. . . . There they are, creepin' up by Lovers' Walk . . . Hey dear! . . . who would think there'd be so much patchwork i' those two dots? . . . To *me*, her walks wi' him like the Grace o' God, now."

"They're at the stile."

"Mountin' it—Sam first. Sam, Sam!" Nance said, concerned. "Thy lady last? Is that manners, Mrs. Rew?"

"Perfect. To help. They're over."

"Oh ay. . . . They've gone! . . . Gone. . . . Well, aw don't know yet; but the last two minutes hev made me feel that Britton, Rache, an' me, may begin to pack for Woverton."

“ Nothing of the kind. Whatever happens, you must stay where you are.”

Nance lifted the corner of her apron to her eyes. They were only grateful tears of compliance. How she would try and try to be worthy of it all !

The little mother was right. She did know Sam. His silence meant consent, after all.

And Grace's silence meant that, too.

And the twilight silence of Watch Witch Wood seemed to mean the consent of the whole of Nature as well.

THE END





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